Health service should harness IT for better patient care, say Tories

The Conservative Party says nursing colleges and medical schools should take urgent action to ensure healthcare students are computer literate.

A report by the party, *Independent Review of NHS and Social Care IT*, said training should emphasise how IT can be linked to better patient care.

The report also recommends that more skilled computer technicians should be on hand to help nurses and other healthcare workers understand the new systems.

**Skills gap**
The report said: ‘The training of IT in medical and nursing schools should greatly enhance the workforce’s ability to use new technology and adapt more quickly, but trusts will need to consider methods of overcoming gaps in skill sets before the more skilled workforce reaches the workplace from colleges.’

But Council of Deans of Health executive officer Paul Turner told *Nursing Standard*: ‘There is already a lot of IT training in programmes and we often find that students already have high skill levels in the area.

‘I think the report seems to duck the real issue, which is the IT capacity of some existing staff. It is mentioned, but is not given the priority it should have.’

The review was carried out with the help of Sir Jonathan Asbridge, critical care nurse and former president of the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and Gail Beer, an independent consultant with a special interest in the care of older people.

The Conservatives say they would scrap part of the centralised NHS national IT programme and replace it with more local systems – with more patient input. This could be run by companies such as Google and Microsoft.

**IN BRIEF**

*A consensus is needed on how to conduct research into the clinical and cost effectiveness of complementary therapies, according to an independent advisory group convened by the King’s Fund.* The group’s report, *Assessing Complementary Practice: Building Consensus on Appropriate Research Methods*, found that, despite the increasing popularity of acupuncture, reflexology and osteopathy, evidence on whether and how the research works is sparse.

*More than 50,000 people have logged on to watch an RCN social networks video in the two weeks since its launch.* The online video was created as part of a drive to offer new ways for nurses and members of the public to interact with the RCN. The short video details how nurses can get instant information and comment on the latest issues in nursing via the RCN Twitter website, monthly podcasts and general secretary Peter Carter’s blog. Go to [www.rcn.org.uk/socialnetworks](http://www.rcn.org.uk/socialnetworks)

*The Department of Health (DH) has launched a package of preventive measures to help older people stay fit and healthy.* Launching the package, care service minister Phil Hope said it would encourage older people to undertake light exercise and gain easier access to footcare and eyesight tests. The DH also wants older people to undergo cancer screening and be vaccinated against influenza.

*People living in deprived districts are around three times more likely to die of a stroke than those in more affluent areas.* Statistics from the Stroke Association and British Heart Foundation also show that more than 40 per cent of strokes could be prevented by controlling high blood pressure, and lifestyle changes such as stopping smoking, moderating alcohol consumption, improving diet and increasing physical activity.

*The RCN and the British Medical Association have warned the Isle of Man government that changing nurses’ pensions could have a severe effect on the island’s health services.* The organisations were responding to its consultation on changes to public sector pensions, which includes raising the retirement age by five years. Isle of Man RCN representative Voirrey Kewley said that many nurses would leave the profession if the plans went ahead. A work-to-rule has been discussed by members, she added.

*Two nurses are among 21 finalists in the inaugural NHS Leadership Awards.* Tricia Hart, director of nursing and patient safety at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, was shortlisted for the inspiration award, while Becci Martin, North West mentoring scheme manager at Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, was nominated for NHS mentor of the year.

*Free courses are being run for people with long-term health conditions and their carers to help reduce the number of missed NHS appointments.* The Expert Patients Programme Community Interest Company says the courses give patients more control over their care and means they are less likely to miss appointments. In 2007/08, there were 6.5 million missed appointments in the NHS, according to figures released by the four UK health departments.