INVESTMENT IS CRUCIAL TO STRENGTHEN THE NURSING WORKFORCE, SAYS HEALTH MINISTER

More public health nurses are needed to respond to an ageing population and risk factors such as obesity and dementia, health minister Dan Poulter has said.

Addressing delegates at a Public Health England conference last week, Dr Poulter said that changes in population demographics and health needs meant investment in a more robust nursing workforce was essential.

He warned the country was facing challenging times ahead, and urged nurses to promote and strengthen the focus on population health.

Front line staff

Dr Poulter said: ‘I work on the front line myself and the biggest concern is not having enough staff to deliver care. We are in difficult times and have to make sure we have enough money to employ front line staff.’

His comments follow recent protests by nurses in England at the government’s refusal to award all NHS workers a 1 per cent pay rise this year. Hospitals across the country are also seeing average nurse vacancy rates of 10 per cent and are now looking abroad to recruit because of the difficulties in hiring staff from the UK.

But Dr Poulter said the annual NHS staff survey had shown that staff satisfaction at work had improved and the most important thing was to make sure there were enough frontline staff to deliver quality care.

Nurses should be empowered to challenge doctors who overprescribe antibiotics in development, making it vital antibiotic use is reduced and infection control improved.

Ms Singleton highlighted National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance that recommends delayed prescribing for sore throats and other respiratory infections. Doctors give a prescription for antibiotics for the following day and patients are advised to take the medication only if symptoms worsen.

In Canada, GPs are not allowed to prescribe antibiotics without first taking a swab for analysis.

Last week, prime minister David Cameron announced a review into why so few anti-microbial drugs had been introduced in recent years. The results will inform plans for encouraging the development of new antibiotics.