NURSES IN THE FRONT LINE OF CUTS AT HEE

Nearly one third of senior Health Education England (HEE) posts that will be axed to reduce costs are held by nurses, Nursing Standard has learned.

HEE, which is responsible for the education and training of NHS staff, is cutting its wage bill after it was told by the Department of Health to lower its annual running costs from £85 million to £68 million by 2015/16.

The 26 managing director and director of education and quality positions across HEE’s 13 local education and training boards (LETBs) will be cut. Eight of the posts are held by nurses.

There will be a reduction of 60 posts to 45 across the organisation, with each LETB having a newly defined director role, while four regional director and four regional director of education and quality posts will be created.

RCN senior employment relations adviser Karen Didovich said: ‘HEE has been fully operational for little more than a year and we are concerned that it has been asked to reduce resources and leadership roles at a time when it has been successfully strengthening local relationships and making good progress in delivering on its mandate.’

‘The RCN argued for the director of education and quality to have a clinical qualification as we want to ensure that clinical leadership is retained within HEE and the LETBs. We welcome the HEE board agreeing to ratify this requirement. Clinical leadership is increasingly important during a period of significant workforce challenge for health care.’

HEE has said it is seeking to avoid ‘unnecessary duplication’ of functions within the LETBs.

Affected staff have been told about the proposals and the HEE board agreed the changes last week.

The restructure is due to be completed in March next year.

Pay rise ‘a political issue’ as review body ignored

The government is refusing to revisit its decision to deny 70 per cent of nurses a 1 per cent cost of living pay rise next April – despite the looming threat of industrial action by a number of health unions.

Chief secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander has written to the NHS Pay Review Body (RB) reiterating the government’s intention to award a 1 per cent increase only to those staff who are at the top of their pay band and not entitled to an incremental rise.

In March, health secretary Jeremy Hunt provoked fury after he rejected a recommendation by the RB that all Agenda for Change staff should receive a 1 per cent boost. Instead, he said that in 2014/15 and 2015/16 only nurses not entitled to an increment would receive a 1 per cent non-consolidated rise.

Unison, GMB, the Royal College of Midwives and Unite will be balloting their members in the coming weeks on whether to take industrial action over the dispute.

Mr Alexander said in his letter to the RB that a 1 per cent award is appropriate because health workers are generally in decent supply and there is no need for wage incentives to attract extra staff. He said that pay restraint is also needed because the economic climate remains difficult.

‘Unfortunately, the NHS trade unions are not prepared to negotiate an affordable alternative, although we are still open to new proposals,’ he added. ‘Therefore it is our intention to take the same approach in 2015/16.’

But Unison head of health Christina McAnea described Mr Alexander’s letter as ‘provocative’, at a time when unions are preparing to ballot. Unite national officer for health Barrie Brown said the government’s refusal to accept the ruling of the independent RB has effectively ‘stood down’ the organisation, turning NHS pay into a political issue for the first time since the 1980s.

‘The unions are prepared to look at other options with a blank piece of paper,’ he said. ‘It is not right to say there aren’t recruitment problems. We know trusts are going to other countries for nurses.’

He added: ‘There is no problem recruiting MPs to Parliament, but they got an 11 per cent pay rise this year.’

The Scottish Government will consult with the RB as normal, saying its role is ‘vital’. The Welsh and Northern Irish governments were not able to comment.

TELL US IF YOU ARE PREPARED TO TAKE ACTION OVER PAY

Nursing Standard has teamed up with the Sunday Mirror for the second year running to discover nurses’ views on a range of issues such as staffing levels and morale.

Last year 1,700 readers responded to our survey, which found more than a third rated workplace morale as poor. Findings from the poll were then taken on board by the NHS Pay Review Body for the 2014 pay award.

Now, as unions including Unison, the Royal College of Midwives and Unite prepare to ballot on industrial action over this year’s pay deal, we are asking nurses if they would be prepared to take action.

Other questions include: ‘On your last shift were there enough staff to provide a safe level of care?’

To take part go to: www.surveymonkey.com/s/nursingstandard and you will be entered into a prize draw to win one of 50 £10 Marks and Spencer vouchers.