EXCLUSIVE

By Graham Scott @NSeditor

A consensus that nursing associates should be regulated has emerged from consultation on the proposed role, Health Education England’s nursing director Lisa Bayliss-Pratt revealed.

The Shape of Caring review, led by Lord Willis and published last year, identified a gap between registered nurses with degrees and support staff. The nursing associate role is designed to bridge that gap and a consultation on it closed in March. Health Education England (HEE) has said nursing associates would be band 4s, and provide hands-on care.

HEE plans to publish its consultation findings next month, but Professor Bayliss-Pratt told the sixth International Nurse Education Conference in Brisbane, Australia, last week: ‘The feedback tells us most people think this role must be regulated. Hopefully we shall get to that place.’

In its response to the consultation, the Nursing and Midwifery Council said the government must decide whether the role should be regulated and should assess this by considering public protection and confidence.

The NMC said it would be the appropriate body to regulate the role.

‘I SEE LIST OF ROLE’S SKILLS, AND THINK “THAT’S WHAT I WAS DOING AS A NURSE”’

Unite national officer for health Barrie Brown favours a regulated role. He said: ‘They should be regulated because of the role they are going to have. Patients have got to be protected.’

He added that regulation would ensure nursing associates adhere to the NMC Code and would provide an opportunity for revalidation.

Healthcare unions raised concerns in the consultation that the role could recreate the old state-enrolled nurse and lead to nursing associates being expected to carry out registered nurses’ work but without the recognition.

Professor Bayliss-Pratt acknowledged the plan to create nursing associates was ‘quite controversial’ and admitted that some of the responses to the consultation had surprised her.

‘One of the questions was what kind of activities, and what knowledge and skills, these people need to do or have. When I looked at the list, I thought “crikey, that’s what I was doing as a nurse”.’

She shared the platform with Anne Marie Rafferty, professor of nursing and dean of the Florence Nightingale school of nursing at King’s College London, who declared her opposition to the introduction of nursing associates.

Professor Rafferty said that healthcare support workers should be regulated instead and given a ‘proper 18-month certificate so that they can move up the ladder and progress’.

Go to page 8 and www.rcni.com/newsroom/news for more from the education conference

‘Die-in’ protest outlines opposition to loan plan

Nursing students drew chalk outlines on the ground outside the Department of Health in London as they accused the government of ‘killing’ the NHS.

Trainee nurses laid down in Whitehall to oppose the government’s plan to scrap the nursing bursary in favour of student loans. Messages for health secretary Jeremy Hunt, including ‘This is Our NHS – Hands Off Hunt’, were chalked with the outlines as part of what the protesters called a ‘die-in’.

The government began a consultation about the bursary plan last week.

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