Fast fact

‘With colder weather forecast in the coming days is there anyone you could check on?’

Public Health England
@PHE_uk

For advice on helping vulnerable patients in cold weather, go to rcni.com/cold-weather-warning

Nurse apprentices ‘won’t solve workforce shortage’

By Stephanie Jones-Berry  @NurseNewsSteph

The government’s planned nursing degree apprenticeships represent a ‘drop in the ocean’ and will not solve the nursing workforce shortage, say nurse academics.

The Council of Deans of Health (CoDoH), which represents UK universities that offer nursing and midwifery courses, also said opportunities combining work and study to qualify as a registered nurse were not new.

Health secretary Jeremy Hunt last week unveiled further details of the new apprenticeships scheme, which begins in 2017.

The scheme will see up to 1,000 future nurses train on the job each year, rather than completing a traditional degree.

CoDoH chair Dame Jessica Corner said: ‘More opportunities to qualify as a nurse are welcome, providing they are properly resourced and education standards are consistent, whatever routes students come through.’

‘We should also be clear this will not solve the nursing workforce shortage.

‘With 20,000 nursing student places in England each year, 1,000 apprentices who may take 5 years to join the workforce are a drop in the ocean.’

Professor Corner added that the quickest way to boost the supply of nurses was to recruit more people through conventional programmes and retain them in the workforce long term.

Trainees will join the apprenticeship at different stages, depending on their qualifications and experience, and will be trained in line with the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s pre-registration standards.

‘We need to ensure their clinical experience is a learning environment’

Janet Davies, RCN general secretary

The Department of Health confirmed that salaries for apprentice nurses would be set locally.

RCN general secretary Janet Davies welcomed the government’s recognition of the need to increase nurse numbers, but added: ‘While this new apprenticeship model will provide a different opportunity, we need to be careful their clinical experience is a learning environment and they have access to graduate-level education.

‘Nursing has progressed over many years, we must be careful to learn from the lessons of the past when student nurses were often seen as nursing on the cheap.’