UK may face shortfall of 36,000 nurses by 2030

By Petra Kendall-Raynor

The UK faces a potential shortage of more than 36,000 nurses by 2030, a new study has shown.

The research, published in the Human Resources for Health journal, is believed to be one of the first detailed analyses of nurse and doctor shortfall or surplus across high-income countries over the next decade.

The study also suggests a possible shortfall of more than 1.1 million nurses and 45,000 midwives by 2030 across the countries in the study, including Ireland, France, Germany, Australia and Canada.

The RCN warned that the figures for UK nursing could have ‘serious implications for patient care’ and wants the government to concentrate on a long-term workforce strategy.

RCN general secretary Janet Davies said: ‘We are already living with a huge staffing crisis. There are 24,000 nursing vacancies in the health service. Delivering safe patient care with a shortfall of 36,000 nurses will simply not be possible.’

The researchers gathered information about the healthcare workforce of 32 high-income countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The authors simulated future supply of, and requirements for, midwives, nurses and physicians for each country from 2015-30 by using information from the OECD’s online indicator database.

They also used existing online sources, such as data from the World Health Organization.

Practical solutions

One of the authors of the report, Gail Tomblin Murphy, a professor at Dalhousie University school of nursing in Canada, said: ‘We would encourage the UK to closely study the healthcare needs of its population, and to carefully consider ways in which it could make better use of its nursing workforce and team-delivered care to address those needs.’

Workforce expert James Buchan, professor in the school of health sciences at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, said that while the analysis does not show if staff have the right skills or are deployed in the right place, it does suggest nursing shortfalls should be a policy priority in the UK.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘We now have more than 29,300 extra clinical staff, including more than 11,200 more nurses, on our wards since May 2010, as well as 51,000 nurses in training.’

80% of people who identified themselves as ‘often lonely’ felt less so after taking part in an Age UK pilot programme

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