Nurse vacancies climb to all-time high in Scotland

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Nursing and midwifery vacancies in Scotland continue to rise, as does spend on temporary staff, according to data released by the Information Services Division Scotland (ISD).

The ISD report says vacancies have increased by 27.5% since March 2016, with 2,818 whole-time equivalent posts (WTE) unfilled. Around 670 of these have been vacant for three months or more.

It means the total number of vacancies is at the highest level ever recorded by the ISD, but the information service says this is in part down to ‘improved recording’.

Despite the vacancies, the report also shows the number of nurses and midwives in WTE posts increased by 0.7% in the year to March 2017.

RCN Scotland associate director Norman Provan said: ‘The figures reflect the challenge faced by Scotland’s NHS. Across acute and community settings, there are simply too few nurses.

‘The government can point to the increase in the number of nursing and midwifery staff, but nurses wanting to do their best for patients are too often coming up against the reality of vacancies in the workforce.

‘Morale is low, and teams are struggling to recruit and retain staff they need. The 1% cap on nursing pay is adding to the anger of nurses who are working under enormous pressure, constantly being asked to do more with less.

‘The bottom line is that if there aren’t the nurses, patients won’t receive the care they need.’

The ISD said NHS Scotland spent a total of £166.5 million on nursing and midwifery bank and agency staff during the latest financial year. This was an increase of £8.4 million (5.3%) compared with 2015-16.

Around £142 million went on bank staff, with £24.5 million covering agency costs.

The Scottish Government said staffing was at a historic high, with 3,015.4 more WTE nursing and midwifery staff introduced by the Scottish National Party, as well as record numbers of allied health professionals.

Health secretary Shona Robison said: ‘Under this government, we have more consultants, nurses and midwives delivering care for the people of Scotland.’

CELEBRATED NURSE

Memorial held for Dame Sheila Quinn

The life of ‘remarkable’ former RCN president Dame Sheila Quinn was celebrated at a memorial service at St Paul’s Cathedral in London last week.

Dame Sheila, who died in December aged 96, began her nursing career in 1943 and went on to become RCN president in the 1980s. RCN general secretary Janet Davies said in her eulogy: ‘Dame Sheila was a remarkable woman and a devoted nurse.’

She cited Dame Sheila’s work with organisations including the International Council of Nurses and the World Health Organization. Dame Sheila was chair of RCN council for five years, RCN deputy president in 1973-74 and president from 1982-1986. She was made RCN life vice-president in 1986 and a Dame of the Order of the British Empire in 1987.

IN BRIEF

An HIV treatment that is not routinely available on the NHS in England has been deemed an ‘essential’ medicine by the World Health Organization.

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