Nurses are spending hundreds of pounds being misinformed and exploited by educational establishments keen to make a fast buck in the run up to PREP, the UKCC heard last week.

Members are worried that some practitioners are attending expensive PREP study courses which give out bogus certificates, false information, and exploit practitioners' fears about what PREP involves.

Mary Hanratty said: 'I am concerned about the opportunistic skills of individuals trying to make a fast buck on the back of PREP'.

The issue of 'PREP certificates' was particularly distressing, she said, because there was not a requirement that nurses had to have a PREP certificate for anything.

Sue Richards said she had already received enquiries from nurses 'misinformed' about personal profiling and the ENB higher award, with some nurses being told that if they did less than 15 hours study a week they would not fulfil PREP requirements.

UKCC assistant registrar Maggy Wallace said there was no doubt that with PREP legislation nearly in place, there were some misleading statements being made which needed to be monitored, but she called for a 'pragmatic approach' which did not limit initiative.

She said the PREP fact sheets, due to be mailed out to all nurses on March 25 at a cost of nearly £500,000, would help because they made it explicit there was no such thing as an approved PREP study day.

'There is definitely immoral practice going on,' she claimed, calling on practitioners to avoid paying out between £250 and £500 course fees. 'That's not what PREP is about, she said.

Call for rule change to benefit EN job hopes

Enrolled nurses will be forced to stay in low-grade jobs unless the UKCC abolishes an 'outdated' rule which prevents them upgrading, a council member warned last week.

EN Jackie Furlong called on council to consider removing rule 18.2, which sets out the competency second level nurses must reach before the end of their training. 'It could be used to limit the practice of ENs,' she warned.

Speaking after the meeting, she claimed the 'outdated' rule limited ENs by stipulating they can only 'assist' a first level nurse and prevented them acting as mentors or supervisors. 'When enrolled nurses have moved far beyond the point of assisting they are often in charge of F and G grades,' she added.

'Managers, trusts and health authorities are using the rule to hold ENs back when applying for jobs and once in post.

'Not all ENs want to convert' she said, 'and this rule prevents those nurses moving along the grading system - especially above grade C'.

Mary Hanratty agreed ENs had been 'used and abused' but urged the council to move cautiously to protect ringfenced money allocated for EN conversion courses.

UKCC Assistant Registrar Maggy Wallace said there may well be a need to unlock managers from their slavish obedience to rule 18.2 but insisted the rule could not be abolished before a replacement - 'something which outlines what ENs do and their skills' - was found.

The findings of an enrolled nurse survey will be considered at the next meeting in May.

Concern over additions to HIV test programme

Council members raised concerns about government plans to add other infectious diseases to the anonymised HIV testing programme.

Patients receiving anonymous testing for HIV could soon be subjected to additional tests, but the UKCC has criticised the health department for failing to stipulate which diseases will be tested for and not amending information given to patients and health workers.

Assistant registrar Reg Pyne, in his response to the Doh Communicable Disease Branch, said that although the council accepted anonymous testing would provide valuable public health information, practitioners could find it difficult to answer patients' questions if they did not know what other diseases were included. Hepatitis C was the only thing the DoH seemed to have in its sights, he said.

Alison Scott said the scheme raised issues of public trust and warned practitioners could have problems counselling. Some members welcomed the introduction of hepatitis C tests.

Council backs board nurses

The UKCC has lent its weight to the campaign to force all purchasing health authorities to include a nurse on their boards.

Guidance to health authorities on how to involve professionals in their work must include nurses if patients are to get the maximum benefit from primary care led purchasing, Council members warned.

An RCN proposal that all purchasers should be forced to appoint a board nurse was rejected recently in parliament and a government amendment was passed to take 'appropriate advice' from practitioners.

Council member Jenny Hughes said: 'It's almost a conspiracy to keep us out.'