Survey finds ward managers’ pay is inconsistent and inadequate

Exclusive by Adele Waters

Most ward sisters and charge nurses are being paid less than unions’ recommended salary for their level, a Nursing Standard survey shows.

Health unions recommend ward managers are paid up to £39,273, equivalent to NHS pay band 7, but half of those who responded to our online survey said they earned between £24,831 and £33,436.

Just over a third earn up to £39,273 and a far smaller proportion of survey respondents earn above that.

The survey of 224 ward managers found most had had more than 20 years’ experience and managed teams of at least 30 staff. Half believed they were not rewarded properly. The salary differences confound claims of greater NHS-wide pay consistency that Agenda for Change (AFC) promised in 2004.

The RCN expects all nurses who match the AFC ward manager profile to receive the minimum AFC band 7 salary. In a review of the ward manager role published in February, the college found that pay was an area of ‘considerable discontent’. The Nursing Standard survey asked what ward managers pay rise would remedy their dissatisfaction. Almost one third said a pay rise of £10,000 would help, while just 7 per cent suggested increasing pay by £20,000 and 3 per cent wanted an increase of more than £30,000.

RCN general secretary Peter Carter said: ‘The ward manager role is an important one. Their leadership and clinical judgement make a real difference to care. Where nurses at any level do not have their skills recognised there will be little incentive for talented nurses to aspire to be ward managers. This is particularly the case when 44 per cent of nurses feel that they are on the wrong pay band.’

Unison head of nursing Gail Adams said: ‘Ward managers are worth their weight in gold. They should be on band 7. There needs to be greater clarity about how the role improves outcomes.’

A Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘The NHS job evaluation scheme covers the diverse demands present in NHS posts and is underpinned by equal pay principles.’

TIME TO BOLSTER THIS VITAL ROLE

Today Nursing Standard launches a campaign to boost the status of ward sisters and charge nurses. Power to Care calls for more support for the estimated 24,000 NHS nurses managing clinical teams. Independent sector ward managers need to be added to this figure.

Power to Care will highlight health organisations that are already delivering for ward managers. The campaign’s focus will be in hospitals but it will also examine the equivalent role in the community. We will ask experts what measures are required to push for change locally – and nationally.

Responding to the campaign launch, a Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘We recognise the ward sister or charge nurse role as key to the organisation of hospital nursing and high quality patient care, combining management, clinical expertise, education and teaching.

‘However, it is for local NHS organisations to determine how much authority is delegated, taking into account their nurses’ skills, training and existing workloads.’

See campaign launch on pages 12-16

Campagne aims

Power to Care wants all ward managers to have:

› A supervisory role – to oversee care, teach and support staff.
› Authority to match responsibility – to order equipment or staff without a manager’s approval.
› Administrative support – a ward clerk as part of their team.
› Housekeeping support in their team.
› Managerial support from their director of nursing.
› Equal status to consultant and specialist nurses.
› Appropriate preparation for role.

Campaign launch on pages 12-16