School nurses often feel unable to protect children

Independent school nurses are isolated and in some cases unable to protect children because of lack of training, Nursing Standard has learned.

One school nurse said she felt unable to protect young people from potential abuse because of differences in consent laws abroad.

The nurse, from an independent school in the south of England, revealed how she felt ‘helpless’ when she discovered that a 15-year-old Chinese student was being abused in China. The nurse, who asked not to be named, said she was told by police in England that they could not do anything about the issue because the age of consent in China is 14.

She added that she had contacted the local primary care trust (PCT) on several occasions for guidance, but had not been successful. Speaking at an RCN school nurses’ community conference in London, independent school nurses said that a lack of training on safeguarding left them feeling isolated.

Another independent school nurse from London, who also wanted to remain anonymous, said there is an incorrect perception that abuse does not happen to children who attend independent schools. She added that there was complacency among some head teachers who may not want to admit there is an issue in their school.

NHS East Midlands safeguarding children and adults lead Jane Appleby, who chaired a session on safeguarding at last week’s event, said she had been approached by several independent school nurses in England who were worried about a lack of training in child protection.

RCN children and young people’s nursing adviser Fiona Smith advises nurses to contact the local PCT’s designated safeguarding nurse or doctor, “Training and isolation can be a huge issue for nurses working in the independent school sector,” she said.

Independent Schools Association chief executive officer Neil Roskilly stated: ‘Nurses who feel a little isolated should raise issues directly with their head teachers and the governor who has responsibility for child protection.’

NURSE QUizzed FOR SIX DAYS OVER CLoSTRıĐIUM DIFFICILE OUTBREAK

Nurses should not be made ‘scapegoats’ for wider failings at a hospital that experienced a fatal clostridium difficile outbreak killing 18 people, according to Labour’s Scottish health spokesperson.

Jackie Baillie, member of the Scottish Parliament for Dunbarton, whose constituency covers the Vale of Leven Hospital, was speaking as the latest session of a public inquiry into the outbreak got under way.

She said: ‘It is important that the lessons that need to be learnt are learnt, and that long-term changes are made so nurses are properly supported and robust mechanisms are put in place to stop anything like this happening again.’

Around 20 nurses who worked at the Vale of Leven Hospital in 2007 and 2008 when the outbreak took place are expected to give evidence to the inquiry. Senior charge nurse Lesley Fox, who was in charge of the ward during the outbreak, was questioned for six days.

She admitted signing a witness statement wrongly stating that documentation on the risk of pressure ulcers, known as the Waterloo assessment, would be included in patient notes.

But defending staff in the ‘busy’ ward, she said: ‘I do not believe that my staff wantonly – including myself – failed to complete these documents properly. Although there was an absence of nursing documentation, there was never an absence of care.’

Later in evidence, Ms Fox said that uncertainty surrounding the hospital’s future and its run-down condition affected staff morale.

The inquiry, chaired by Lord MacLean, is expected to report in September next year.