Conference cancellations could affect professional development

By Petra Kendall-Raynor

Nurses’ professional development is at risk due to conference cancellations as clinicians struggle to find time and funds to attend events, Nursing Standard has learned.

Several conferences have been cancelled in recent weeks due to a lack of delegates, including the RCN’s practice nurse conference and its children and young people professional issues forum conference.

RCN advanced nurse practitioner forum chair Jenny Aston is so concerned that she is advising nurses to set out the benefits of attending events before approaching employers for time off.

Ms Aston added that some nurses are approaching universities or schools of nursing where they trained to ask for grants to attend conferences.

Decline in delegates

Conference organiser Healthcare Events Ltd went into administration in July. Former partner and programme director Clare Gallagher said ‘decline and uncertainty’ in the conference market was in part to blame. Ms Gallagher is now managing director of Healthcare Conferences UK, which took over Healthcare Events.

She said: ‘We are offering discounts for delegates and although numbers have reduced over the past 18 months due to the challenge of getting funding, nurses are still keen to attend.’

Tissue Viability Society chair Alison Hopkins said the decline in events was putting professional development at risk. She said: ‘When I started in this role 16 years ago we used to run two-day leg ulcer study days at least twice a year, often having 20-plus staff attend. Now we are lucky if we get six attending a two-hour workshop.

‘Theoretical underpinning is being lost. The only focus is the immediate task and possibly risk assessment.’ She added that fewer conferences reduced nurses’ speaking opportunities.

RCN student and education adviser Gill Robertson said some nurses do not to ask employers if they can attend because they know they will be turned down.

But RCN conference events manager Brian French said: ‘Many of our conferences have been well attended and we have been trying to make them even more accessible and affordable.’

NHS Employers director Dean Royles said: ‘It is important for taxpayers that we scrutinise discretionary spending. That scrutiny is likely to affect conference attendance, but managers are aware that these events matter.’

A Nursing and Midwifery Council spokesperson said: ‘Employers are responsible for ensuring that nurses have and maintain the appropriate skills and knowledge for their roles. We would encourage all staff to discuss their needs with their line manager and employer regularly.’

MIDWIVES BUILD MATERNITY FEEDBACK SCHEME

Senior midwives at one of England’s largest NHS trusts are taking part in a patient feedback scheme that aims to improve patient experiences.

Women staying at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson maternity wing of University College London Hospitals NHS Trust are visited by senior midwives every day. The patients are asked what they think of their care to date, and are asked to rate areas such as pain relief and support with caring for a newborn.

Each midwife is allocated three or four beds on the 41-bed unit.

Head of midwifery Debby Gould (pictured left) said praise and criticism is passed on to ward managers, who follow-up concerns immediately.

‘Even if you visit the same woman three or four days in a row, you get the chance to build up a relationship and they open up about their care,’ she said. ‘The feedback received already has been fantastic.’