PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING RECEIVES A NEW CHAMPION TO DRIVE CHANGE

One of the UK’s most senior nurses has become the government’s principal adviser on public health nursing.

England’s deputy chief nursing officer (CNO) Viv Bennett (pictured) will advise ministers and nursing leaders on public health as the first director of nursing at the Department of Health (DH). She will provide leadership for public health nurses and develop nursing policy.

Ms Bennett said: ‘As a nurse and health visitor, I am passionate about the application of nursing and midwifery skills and knowledge to improve and protect public health.’

Commenting on the appointment, health secretary Andrew Lansley said: ‘Good nursing care is a central pillar of public health, and strong nursing leadership must be at the heart of this.’

Ms Bennett will be part of the team that will implement various changes to services, including the creation of Public Health England, the agency that will oversee health protection and promotion from April 2013.

Further details of changes to the public health system, including how local authorities will lead on improving services at a regional level, were released by the DH last month. The changes are subject to the successful passage of the Health and Social Care Bill through parliament later this year.

RCN general secretary Peter Carter welcomed the DH’s move to clarify the new public health system, but said: ‘It is highly irresponsible to forge ahead with these changes given the absence of such key information and before the legislative process has concluded.’

The DH said a new CNO for England will be recruited in the new year, to replace Dame Chris Beasley, who is retiring.

RISE IN NUMBER OF CANCELLED OPERATIONS

The number of urgent operations cancelled by hospitals has increased by almost 40 per cent, according to government data.

Statistics from hospitals analysed by Nursing Standard reveal that 844 urgent operations were cancelled at short notice in November and the first half of December 2011, compared with 606 during the same period the year before.

The data are published weekly from November to February by the Department of Health (DH) to chart how trusts in England are coping with winter pressures.

The definition of ‘urgent’ includes emergency life-saving operations needed within an hour and those that pose a risk to life if not carried out within 48 hours.

RCN head of policy Howard Catton said: ‘This rise is symptomatic of the financial and capacity pressures that the system is under. It is distressing for patients and their families when urgent operations are cancelled.’

A DH spokesperson said: ‘The NHS must do everything it can to ensure operations take place as planned.’

NMC concludes decade-long misconduct case

Two nurses involved in the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s longest-running fitness to practise case are to seek a judicial review at the High Court.

Sarah Johnson and Lynnette Maggs were found guilty of misconduct by the regulator last month, ten years after allegations were first referred to its predecessor, the UKCC.

The allegations centred on standards of nursing at Lynden House, a private nursing home in Twickenham, between 1998 and 2002. Ms Johnson was manager and Ms Maggs her deputy.

Ms Johnson was found guilty of failing to ensure adequate nursing records were maintained in relation to falls assessments in the cases of four residents. She also failed to ensure a safe system for the administration of medicines for six residents. Ms Maggs was found guilty of failing to ensure adequate nursing records were maintained in relation to falls assessments in the cases of four residents.

The regulator will impose no sanction on the nurses. The conduct and competence committee said it had taken into account the ‘detrimental impact’ of the case on the nurses’ personal and professional lives. It acknowledged that the nurses co-operated throughout, had otherwise unblemished careers and had been the subject of positive testimonials from residents at the care home.

Mary O’Rourke QC, who is representing the women, claimed the nurses’ actions did not amount to misconduct. She said Ms Maggs’s case centred around falls assessment, but such assessments did not become mandatory until 2004.

She said the case against Ms Johnson was based on the administration of ten tablets, which Ms O’Rourke argued was the responsibility of the home’s nursing staff rather than Ms Johnson.

Ms Maggs said: ‘The length of time it has taken to resolve this case has been cruel and caused a great deal of stress.’

Nursing and Midwifery Council fitness to practise director Jackie Smith apologised for the ‘unsatisfactory’ length of time it took to conclude the case.

The council has a target of concluding 90 per cent of cases within 15 months.