Trust brings back badges in bid to celebrate nursing excellence

By Tamsin Snow

Badges are being given to nurses at one of England’s largest NHS trusts if they prove their caring credentials and score full marks in an online assessment.

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust in Birmingham devised the scheme in an attempt to counter negative publicity about the profession.

Trust chief nurse Mandie Sunderland told Nursing Standard that the badge scheme was introduced last week to celebrate good nursing. ‘While the nursing profession needs to deal with poor care highlighted by the media, we wanted to do something to recognise positive work at our trust,’ she said.

Before applying for the badge, nurses must score full marks in the trust’s pioneering online training programme called Vital, which was recently extended to midwives and children’s nurses. Nurses are required to sign up to the trust’s nursing and midwifery professional values and bed up to date with mandatory training.

Staff must also write a 200-word citation outlining how they meet the trust’s values and provide two pieces of evidence that show they provide good care, such as thank you notes from patients or statements from their line managers.

Ms Sunderland wants the first cohort of nurses to have gone through the scheme to be presented with badges at a formal ceremony this summer.

She said badges were commonly awarded to qualified nurses when hospitals were responsible for nurse education until the early 1990s. But when universities took charge of nurse education, the practice stopped.

Ms Sunderland still wears the ‘penny’ badge she was awarded from St Mary’s Hospital in Paddington, London, which is inscribed with the date she qualified. She explained: ‘The badges were precious to nurses as they denoted the three years’ hard graft. We want to give nurses a sense of pride in the hospital where they work.’

Online training

The expansion of the Vital programme to include the trust’s midwives and children’s nurses means all nursing staff can now apply for the badges. The programme was introduced last year for adult nurses and includes a 280-question online assessment covering 14 topics such as falls prevention, continence care, medicine management and dignity (see box).

About 2,500 adult nurses have already undertaken an assessment, which includes 20 questions on each of the 14 topics. To date, about half of those who have taken the assessment have passed with full marks.

Ms Sunderland said the programme has sparked interest nationally and internationally, and she is in early talks with the RCN about sponsorship so that other organisations can use it.

RCN West Midlands regional director Paul Vaughan said: ‘The programme has improved patient outcomes and helped nurses update their practice.’

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How do you score on these questions from the Vital programme assessment?

1. **Tissue viability**
   Which of the following best describes tissue damage due to moisture?
   a) Red excoriation and/or white macerated tissue commonly over buttocks, groins, skin creases or where a highly exuding wound is present.
   b) Non-blanching redness over a bony prominence.
   c) Purple discoloration over the buttocks.
   d) None of the above.

2. **Nutrition**
   Which two of the following explain why the National Patient Safety Agency, in 2008, banned the use of intravenous syringes to measure and deliver oral/enteral medication?
   a) Intravenous syringes do not measure oral liquids as accurately as syringes designed for oral/enteral use.
   b) To prevent the accidental administration of intravenous medications orally.
   c) To prevent the accidental administration of oral medication intravenously.

3. **Diabetes**
   When should Metformin 500mg (oral hypoglycaemic drug) twice daily be given?
   a) Before meals.
   b) With or after meals.
   c) Bedtime.
   d) Does not matter.

   **Answers**
   1: a; 2: b and c; 3: b