LOW LEVEL OF SATISFACTION AMONG NHS STAFF IS ‘WORRYING, BUT NOT SURPRISING’

One in four nurses feel under pressure to go to work when they are ill, an annual NHS staff survey has revealed.

The survey, involving 135,000 NHS staff, including 33,000 nurses and midwives, found less than half of those questioned would recommend their trust as a place of work, which was slightly lower than in last year’s survey. A quarter said there were not enough staff members in their workplace to do their job properly.

Ninety per cent of nurses believe their role makes a difference to patients, although this figure is down 2 per cent from last year. The survey also showed that 76 per cent of nurses and midwives work extra hours, compared with 65 per cent of other NHS staff.

A third of nurses and midwives said they had experienced work-related stress in the past 12 months, the same as in 2010, results show. One in nine had experienced physical violence from patients, relatives or members of the public.

RCN general secretary Peter Carter said: ‘If ever there was proof of the pressures hitting the NHS front line, this is it. It is worrying, but not surprising, that the number of staff prepared to recommend their trust as a place of work is decreasing.’

Unison head of health Christine McAnena said the survey showed ‘increased levels of stress being heaped on staff’.

Health secretary Andrew Lansley claimed that results for staff overall were the same or better: ‘The number of staff happy with the standard of care remains stable.’

Meanwhile, managing director of the NHS and Social Care Workforce Jan Sobieraj told a conference in London last week that the government expects NHS organisations to set out how they will improve staff satisfaction.

Urgent action needed to boost district nurse numbers

Government plans to deliver more care outside acute hospitals are being hit by large reductions in district nurse numbers and a failure to recruit health visitors, figures reveal.

The NHS workforce census 2011 shows district nurse numbers plummeted by 756 to 6,937 in the year to September 2011, a 10 per cent drop and 34 per cent fall in a decade.

The number of full-time equivalent nurses, midwives and health visitors in England fell by 2,387 in the year to September, representing a 0.7 per cent drop. In contrast, doctors’ numbers rose by 1.4 per cent to 1,834 in the same period.

Prime minister David Cameron pledged in February last year to increase health visitor numbers by 4,200 within four years, but the census shows that in the year to September 2011 the number of full-time equivalents actually fell by 76 to 7,941.

The data also show that modern matron and community matron numbers fell by 373 and 83 respectively in the same period.

RCN head of policy Howard Catton said the district nurse reductions were ‘THE FIGURES HIGHLIGHT A CREEPING TRAGEDY FOR PEOPLE LIVING AT HOME WITH COMPLEX CONDITIONS’

’dramatic’. ‘In terms of delivering care closer to home, district nurses are a critical group of staff. We need urgent action not just to halt the reductions, but to develop this workforce.’

Rosemary Cook, director of the community nursing charity the Queen’s Nursing Institute, said the figures highlight a ‘creeping tragedy for people living at home with complex, long-term conditions’.

A Department of Health spokesperson said the total number of professionally qualified clinical staff is still rising. ‘Nurses and other front line staff are central to our plans for the future of our health service. We want to free them from administration to spend more time with patients and give them more power to make decisions on patient care.’

An online petition calling on the government to boost its investment in district nursing has more than 2,283 signatories. The petition was set up by RCN education forum’s steering committee member Richard Fisher and outlines concerns that district nurse numbers are in decline.

Go to http://tinyurl.com/7fr8wxe