Pay increase Some nurses in the American state of Alaska will receive a pay rise of 5.25 per cent over three years.

The figure was negotiated between the Alaska Nurses Association and the Anchorage-based Providence Alaska Medical Center. The move will see a rise in the hourly wages of on-call nurses and the introduction of uninterrupted breaks of at least ten hours between scheduled shifts. The union represents 7,000 nurses.

Staff shortages Medical school graduates yet to pass hospital exams will be able to work as assistant nurses in a bid to reduce staff shortages, the Taiwanese government has announced.

The move follows calls from the National Union of Nurses’ Association for more staff. The association says understaffing and an excess of paperwork has led to nurses working unpaid overtime regularly and is taking them away from direct patient care.

Hospitals can recruit up to a fifth of staff as interns, who will be overseen by qualified nurses and doctors. The association estimates that around 10 per cent of nursing posts are vacant.

Patient information A network of Spanish-speaking nurses has been set up in the United States to improve health information for the country’s Hispanics.

The Hispanic Nurses Network includes Spanish-speaking nurses in Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York and was launched by the National Association of Hispanic Nurses.

Association president Angie Millan said: ‘Nurses, whether at school, workplace or clinics, educate parents and children on health issues. We know Hispanics are searching for information in their own language. Our goal is to support them to deal with health issues in Spanish.’

Broadmoor jobs cut after closure of unit

A total of 78 staff, including 33 nurses, at the high-security psychiatric Broadmoor Hospital in Berkshire have taken voluntary redundancy following the closure of its personality disorder service.

The hospital’s dangerous and severe personality disorder unit closed earlier this month after the Department of Health (DH) announced in October that it would no longer fund the service.

The unit was one of four set up by the government in 2002 to provide mental health services for people with severe personality disorders who were considered to be dangerous as a result of their condition.

Unison regional organiser Eddie Jaggers described the unit’s closure as ‘worrying’ for service users. But he said the trust did well to limit job losses.

‘Initially there were 200 jobs at risk but that was reduced through voluntary redundancies and redeployment. It was handled well.’

Broadmoor Hospital is run by West London Mental Health NHS Trust and a spokesperson confirmed that 78 staff were being made redundant and nine staff were being redeployed.

Nursing Standard nurse of the year and HMP Stafford staff nurse Johanne Tomlinson said: ‘The cutbacks are concerning because this is a vulnerable group with complex needs. More emphasis should be placed on the psychological needs of prisoners.’

A DH spokesperson said its decision to close the Broadmoor unit had unanimous support from interest groups and added that the unit was too expensive to run. She said that no decision had been taken so far about whether the other units – HMP Frankland in County Durham, HMP Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire, and Rampton Hospital in Nottinghamshire – would close.

A Rampton spokesperson said that the prison has sufficient funding to maintain its unit for two years.

Political notebook

Our weekly round-up of news from the corridors of power

Deputy prime minister Nick Clegg has rejected claims that an elected House of Lords would remove members with expert knowledge, such as senior nurses and doctors.

He told the Commons’ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee that one option is for 80 per cent of the reformed chamber to be elected and 20 per cent appointed, allowing experts to continue contributing to the upper chamber.

Conservative MP Andrew Griffiths last week told the committee that the quality of the Lords could be harmed as well as expertise lost because senior professionals would not wish to fight elections.

Nursing Standard’s Peer Pressure campaign is calling for nurses to have an increased voice in the upper chamber.

蹙 Estimates that poor diets, smoking and a lack of exercise cost the NHS around £7 billion a year may be too low, according to health minister Anne Milton.

A study led by University of Oxford academic Peter Scarborough conducted last year found that bad diet in the UK was costing the NHS £5.8 billion, while lack of exercise added a further £1.06 billion.

Ms Milton told the Commons the last figure was ‘a conservative estimate’ as it excluded the cost of treating osteoporosis and falls.