NMC urged to postpone closure of its professional advisory service

By Tamsin Snow

The nurse regulator’s decision to withdraw a telephone and email advisory service for registrants at just ten days’ notice has been criticised by health unions, which are calling for the closure to be delayed.

Last week the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) announced that its professional advisory service will close at the end of June. The move coincides with the regulator’s consultation about increasing fees from £76 to £120 a year from next January.

In an email, the NMC states that providing advice to registrants on clinical issues leads to ‘confusion’ about the organisation’s regulatory role. It states that other organisations such as trade unions, managers and employers are best placed to offer clinical advice.

Unpopular move

‘It is not the role of the NMC to advise individual nurses and midwives on how the standards and guidance should be applied in specific situations. Nurses and midwives must use their professional knowledge, judgement and skills to make a decision based on evidence for best practice and the best interests of users. Often this will be in discussion with colleagues and managers,’ the NMC message states.

But during a meeting of the NMC’s governing body in London last week, Unison head of nursing Gail Adams warned that the short notice period would be unpopular with registrants, given the proposed increase in fees.

She said postponing the service’s closure would help unions to inform their own call centre staff about how to handle calls that would otherwise have been answered by the NMC.

Ms Adams said: ‘Registrants will say this service is all they get from the NMC and I think that unless its withdrawal is delayed, the NMC will come in for an unnecessary kicking for the unreasonable level of notice.’

NMC acting chief executive Jackie Smith said she did not think the closure date could be altered, while NMC deputy chair Judith Ellis said it was never appropriate for the regulator to be providing clinical advice. Professor Ellis said she will consider delaying the move.

Royal College of Midwives deputy general secretary Louise Silverton told Nursing Standard the short notice gave unions insufficient time to plan services. RCN director of nursing Janet Davies described the move as ‘unbelievable’ in the context of the fees proposal.

More than 2,500 people have signed Nursing Standard’s online petition against the fee rise, while more than 44,200 people have signed an e-petition set up by mental health nurse Stephen Iwasyk on the Downing Street website. If more than 100,000 signatures are collected, the issue could be debated in the House of Commons.

Meanwhile, 44 people have applied for the post of NMC chair. The position has been vacant since March. Final interviews will be held next month.

Help comes out of the blue

Three renal nurses and one of their patients took to the skies to raise money for their kidney dialysis unit.

Helen Noyce, ward sister of the dialysis unit at St Mary’s Hospital on the Isle of Wight, pictured with an instructor, made the 12,000ft jump with staff nurse Nadine Slatter, healthcare support worker Alex Kershaw and patient Adrian Crawley. They were raising money to help pay for a counsellor to attend the unit.

Ms Noyce explained that due to its location the unit has limited access to some services. ‘Our patients can feel isolated. Some attend three times a week so we know them well, they are like family and the parachute jump was the least we could do.’

To donate money go to www.bmycharity.com/hnoyce.