Nurses protest over staffing for new NHS phone service

Nurses working for the NHS Direct helpline in the east Midlands have staged a protest to demonstrate the benefits of having healthcare professionals answer calls.

Around a third of nurses employed by NHS Direct in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire staged a ‘work-in’ on July 5, which involved taking NHS Direct calls in their own time.

The nurses, who processed 150 more calls than usual during the one-day protest, were objecting to the service being taken over by NHS 111, which will employ fewer nurses. The proportion of calls taken by nurses is expected to shrink from 75 per cent at NHS Direct to 17 per cent at NHS 111, according to Unison.

The union’s NHS Direct nursing convenor Sandra Maxwell said the nurses wanted to show the risks of not using nurses in the 111 service. ‘Evaluation of 111 pilots shows it is just a signposting service and that there will be many more visits to A&E and more GP out-of-hours appointments.’

Nottingham’s NHS Direct service will be the first in England to be replaced by the new provider on September 3.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: ‘We expect every caller to NHS 111 to be able to receive the best clinical advice quickly, including speaking to a nurse or a doctor if they need to.’

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

An expert in public health has told MPs that he has ‘serious concerns’ about responsibility for public health services transferring from the NHS to councils.

Royal Society for Public Health chief executive Richard Panish told a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on primary care and public health in London last week that there is a poor understanding of what public health is in a ‘significant minority’ of local authorities.

Under the Health and Social Care Act responsibility for public health will transfer to local authorities from April 2013.

Health minister Simon Burns has ruled out government guaranteeing extra funding to expand services at Wythenshawe Hospital in Lancashire to help it cope with an influx of extra patients.

Labour MP for Wythenshawe and Sale East Paul Goggins said plans to close Trafford General Hospital’s A&E would lead to 7,600 extra A&E admissions a year at Wythenshawe Hospital.

But Mr Burns said ministers could not intervene at a local level.

Welsh health minister Lesley Griffiths is due to be questioned by the National Assembly for Wales’ health and social care committee today over allegations that the government influenced an independent report.

She will be questioned about the independence of the Case for Change report on reforming hospital services after it emerged there had been email exchanges between government officials and the report author.

It follows a vote of no confidence in the minister by the three opposition parties in Wales.

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