NMC offered £20m grant to help prevent registration fee hike

By Tamsin Snow and Sally Gillen

Nurses may be spared from having to pay an extra 59 per cent in registration fees after the government offered a £20 million grant to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The Department of Health (DH) in England said the unprecedented offer was an attempt to protect nurses from having to pay the proposed NMC registration fee rise from £76 to £120.

Health minister Dan Poulter said the government expects the nurse regulator to use the money to ‘improve its performance’.

The NMC’s governing body will decide whether to accept or reject the offer at a meeting next week. It is not yet clear whether an acceptance will mean the fee increase can be fully avoided.

An NMC spokesperson said: ‘The offer gives us further options to contribute to the costs of regulating nurses and midwives.’

The government grant was welcomed by unions representing nurses, which have openly criticised the NMC since it proposed the fee hike in May.

RCN head of policy Howard Catton, who has been calling for the government to contribute towards the cost of regulation, said: ‘We have been saying that the £120 is just not acceptable and in our discussions with the DH we suggested that a grant would be one option.’

Meanwhile, the NMC will remain without a permanent chief executive for at least another year after the appointment process was halted because of a lack of suitable candidates.

In a move welcomed by unions, the NMC’s acting chief executive Jackie Smith has been appointed as chief executive for 12 months and the role will be re-advertised next year.

Interviews were due to take place earlier this month, but Nursing Standard understands the process was halted by the NMC’s new chair Mark Addison.

Despite carrying a salary thought to be around £120,000, the prospect of leading an organisation that has attracted frequent criticism in recent years may be proving too daunting.

The post was advertised in May, just weeks after a damning report from umbrella regulator the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence CHRE found long-standing problems ‘at every level’.

First world war nurse Edith Cavell remembered

Royal London Hospital nurses laid wreaths at a ceremony to commemorate nurse Edith Cavell, killed by a firing squad in the first world war.

Iconic nurse Ms Cavell was executed in October 1915 for helping 200 allied soldiers escape to Holland while working in German-occupied Belgium.

During the ceremony at Edith Cavell’s monument in London, nurses dressed in uniforms like those worn in the first world war. A separate ceremony was held at Norwich Cathedral, where she is buried.

Cavell Nurses’ Trust chief executive Kate Tompkins was among those to pay tribute to Ms Cavell. The trust was set up in 1917 and over the past five years it has provided more than £2.5 million to nurses experiencing hard times. See page 22