A TRADITIONAL ROLE IN DECLINE

Lynne Pearce asks if district nursing is still relevant, a topic that will be debated at RCN congress

More patients with complex care needs require nursing from home, yet paradoxically, the number of district nurses is falling.

District nursing is a profession in a quandary, concedes Lucy Botting, former chair of the RCN district nursing forum.

‘Much of what used to be done by district nurses is now done by other specialists such as tissue viability, wound care and continence nurses. The traditional role is in flux.’

An ageing population with complex co-morbidities requiring intricate home care means that district nursing must adapt if it is to survive, Ms Botting argues. ‘People are discharged home from hospital with complex co-morbidities and a super nurse or nurse practitioner cum district nurse who can prescribe is needed to care for them properly.’

Now executive nurse and director of quality and governance at NHS Guildford and Waverley clinical commissioning group (CCG), Ms Botting says the introduction of community matrons was a golden, but missed opportunity. ‘It was an ideal chance to look at an extended role for district nurses, but it didn’t happen,’ she says.

The advent of CCGs will bring much closer scrutiny of district nursing services, she believes. ‘Commissioners will ask many more questions about the value of all services.’

But for senior lecturer Paul Mackreth, course leader for district nursing at Leeds Metropolitan University, the real problem is inaccurate perceptions rather than a

District nurses need to be:

- Adaptable, resourceful and well-organised.
- Able to work in a variety of workplaces without hospital resources.
- Sufficiently resourceful to cope alone in challenging situations.

Hospital nurses NHS hospital nurse volunteers are being sought to take part in a study that aims to improve the relationship between work environments and patient safety. The volunteers will be asked to complete a daily survey at the end of each shift. The Bradford Institute for Health Research and the Institute of Psychological Sciences at the University of Leeds are supporting this research. tinyurl.com/nursingdailystaffingsurvey

Fertility nursing The RCN has launched a new education framework for fertility nurses. The professional guidance is intended to offer training and career support for nurses taking on increased clinical responsibility in this specialty. The publication, developed with input from experts ranging from nurses to sonographers, will be an invaluable tool for nursing and academic staff in fertility services. RCN Training and Education Framework for Fertility Nursing is available from the RCN website at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Healthcare assistants NHS Jobs has developed a job preview tool to help improve the quality of applicants for
fundamental need to change practice. ‘District nursing is stuck with stereotypes and struggles to articulate its function,’ he says.

While he welcomes the recent television documentary series Nursing the Nation for raising the profile of district nurses, it did little to challenge the public image of a friendly home visiting service, he says. ‘Unfortunately the programme did not reflect the more challenging reality of district nursing.’

Although numbers on the 52-week full-time district nursing course at Leeds Metropolitan have dropped from around 30 or 40 students seven or eight years ago to between ten and 15 now, Mr Mackreth remains sanguine.

Drop in numbers
‘There is a different skill mix now. We would expect numbers to fall because the university is training more primary care support workers,’ he says.

This perspective reflects the experience of Vari Drennan, professor of health care and policy research at Kingston University, who is also a former director of nursing in community services. ‘The number of people providing care in the home has steadily increased over the past 20 years, although numbers with the district nurse qualification have dropped,’ she says.

Many district nurses are reaching retirement age and some employers are reluctant to send nurses on a year-long course, says Professor Drennan. ‘But community skills are very different to those needed in a hospital and everyone benefits from some training,’ she says.

‘If we are to help frail older people stay out of hospital, support those who want to die at home and look after people who are discharged after surgery, then we need highly trained and skilled district nurses,’ says Professor Drennan

Lynne Pearce is a freelance journalist

District nursing is stuck with stereotypes and struggles to articulate its function

Teri Harman explains the ins and outs of filling in a tax return form

Taxing matters
Nurses who earn income that is not taxed at source are required to complete a tax return form after April 6.

This includes those who earn money from freelance work, savings or rent from a property, claims for expenses or professional subscriptions totalling more than £2,500 a year; or if you or your partner receive child benefit and your income is above £50,000.

The deadline for filing a paper tax return is October 31 and January 2014 for online returns. Missing the deadline triggers a £100 fine and a delay of more than three months warrants a daily £10 fine.

To complete your return, you will need:
- A P60 from your employer must be given to you before May 31.
- Form P11D from your employer must be given to you before July 6.
- Details of student loan repayments.
- Details of savings interest and any share dividends. You must keep these and other details for 22 months from the end of the past tax year; but as repayments can be claimed up to four years in arrears it makes sense to keep them longer.

Confused? The HM Revenue and Customs website will guide you through the online form and paper returns are accompanied by a comprehensive guide. Try copying the form for practise before completing a final version NS

Teri Harman is a freelance finance journalist

Resources
Advice on tax returns tinyurl.com/ca4lop7
HMRC helplines 0845 9000 444 for paper returns and 0845 605 5999 for general queries

Indemnity insurance
A European Union directive on patients’ rights in cross-border health care requires that member states have systems of professional liability in place. This means that all regulated healthcare professionals would have to hold indemnity insurance to practise as a condition of their registration with the relevant regulatory body. The Department of Health has launched a consultation on draft regulations arising as a result of this, which runs until May 17. tinyurl.com/Indemnity-insurance

Mary Seacole statue
Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole, who tended the sick in the Crimean War, will be honoured with a statue in St Thomas’ Hospital garden alongside Westminster Bridge in London. An evening of jazz to raise funds for the appeal will be held on April 10 at Jamm in Brixton, featuring saxophonist Courtney Pine. Tickets are available at tinyurl.com/pine-tickets

Social media
A new briefing from NHS Employers looks at how line managers and senior staff can use social media in their organisations to improve staff engagement. It discusses how social media platforms can be used to engage staff and provides examples of how this has already been done successfully. tinyurl.com/Social-media-staff

NURSING STANDARD