NMC’s new standards will change your role

Regulator’s ambitious standards apply to all nurses, not just students

The first students have embarked on newly approved nurse education programmes designed to meet the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s (NMC) new proficiency standards.

To date, about two thirds of our nurse education providers in England have been approved, with 25 ready to begin their programmes and more completing this process each week.

The ambitious standards were published in May 2018, as part of the regulator’s new standards for education and future nurse plans.

The start of these programmes is another notable landmark in the history of nurse regulation, and particularly fitting as we prepare to celebrate the professionalism of nursing in the UK by marking a century since the Nurses Registration Act 1919.

Standards will affect all nurses

However, the NMC is mindful that the standards are not just about students and education providers; they are about the people we care for and they affect the whole of the nursing workforce.

Changing demographics and healthcare priorities mean that the standards of proficiency for registered nurses needed to be ambitious to meet the needs of local populations now and in the future.

All registered nurses need to understand the impact of the changes on their own role and how they can contribute to implementation of the standards, but we know that understanding across the workforce is variable.

This is not just about the changes in education roles – such as mentors being replaced by supervisors and assessors – it is also about all nurses making changes to enhance their own practice.

Nurse leaders on implementation boards in the UK’s four countries are sending out this important message, focusing on the development of the current workforce as well as influencing the new curriculum with education providers.

Supporting information is available on the NMC website and resources are being developed by implementation boards and practice learning groups across the regions. The RCN also has useful information and resources based on feedback from its workshops.

Every nurse must gain proficiency in supervision

The focus for the development of nurses is twofold. First, education providers and their practice learning partners are agreeing how to prepare supervisors and assessors in line with NMC standards. We will no longer be approving mentorship programmes, however the standards expect all supervisors and assessors to be appropriately prepared for their role. Transferable skills will be taken into account, so this is not about retraining.

All registered nurses should be able to provide supervision, and students embarking on future nurse programmes will need to demonstrate proficiency in supervision of others at the point of registration – not only is this a standard of proficiency, but it is also stated in The Code.

Second, we have heard that some qualified nurses and current students are concerned that they will not be proficient or have the knowledge to teach some of the new skills expected of the ‘Future Nurse’ students. We would not expect professionals to teach something in which they are not proficient. Supervisors must have the knowledge and skills relevant to the learning outcomes for each student, and where there are skill gaps, other professionals could supervise the student. For example, in general practice, a GP could supervise a student to undertake a whole body assessment.

Enabling nurses to provide better, safer care

Most important is learning new knowledge and skills, which can enable a qualified nurse to enhance their scope of practice to provide better, safer care. Such learning becomes part of continuing professional development and forms a part of the revalidation process.

Ultimately, the new standards provide an opportunity for individual development; they promote good learning environments and enable students to learn in a safe and effective way.

We are on an upward spiral trajectory to ensure those on our register can provide the right care to the highest standard – which I am sure is what we all want to see.