In quotes

‘There is no cynicism from staff about having the flu vaccination. We push the message of protecting patients and colleagues’

Richard Parker
chief executive, Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
See page 51

‘Generally, people don’t die from leg ulcers, so it’s not seen as a priority. But what is more nurse-related than wound care?’

Una Adderley
director, England’s National Wound Care Strategy Programme
See page 69

IMMIGRATION

Language requirements for overseas nurses eased

By Kimberley Hackett  @kj_hackett

The government has scrapped its language test for overseas nurses. Effective from this month, the change means those who want to work in the UK will now only have to meet the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s (NMC) language requirements.

The government said its exam was unnecessary because the test required by the nursing regulator has a higher pass threshold.

It said the change means hospitals, nursing homes and GP practices will be able to access staff more quickly.

Previously, nurses had to sit two English language tests – one for the NMC and one for the UK Visas and Immigration service.

The regulator accepts either the International English Language Test System (IELTS) or the Occupational English Test.

The changes will also apply to midwives, doctors and dentists. Healthcare professionals who want to settle in the UK will still be required to undertake a language skills test if they apply for citizenship, the government said.

Immigration minister Seema Kennedy said the government wanted to make it as easy as possible for healthcare professionals to come to the UK.

In December 2018, the NMC agreed to lower its pass threshold for the IELTS exams, following criticism that it was too high from NHS employers struggling to recruit nurses.

The regulator now accepts a mark of 6.5 for writing in the IELTS, lowered from level 7. However, the level 7 pass required for reading, listening and speaking remains unchanged.

NMC director of registration and revalidation Emma Broadbent welcomed the government’s decision. ‘This measure also chimes well with the NMC’s continued efforts to streamline the way overseas registrants join our register,’ she said.

The move comes after the interim NHS People Plan, which sets out how the NHS should recruit, retain and develop staff in England, said that addressing nursing shortages was the ‘most urgent workforce challenge’ facing the health service.

The plan said international nurse recruitment needed to be stepped up to secure ‘rapid increases in supply’, but stopped short of a specific target.

An RCN spokesperson described the government’s decision as a positive step ‘at a time when our nursing workforce is desperately short of the numbers needed to deliver care to growing numbers of patients with increasing needs’.

CPD

Government pledges £1,000 a head for professional development

Every nurse providing NHS services in England has been promised a £1,000 continued professional development (CPD) fund, spread over three years.

The Treasury has set aside £150 million for the first tranche of funding in 2020-21, a step up from £84 million this year.

However, the RCN and the Council of Deans of Health (CoDH) said the government needs to go much further, and they want ministers to pledge investment in preregistration education.

The RCN also expressed disappointment that the CPD funding will not help nurses practising outside NHS services.

The college’s general secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said the funding ‘will help to ensure every [NHS] nurse can access training – though it needs to be extended to all nursing staff’.

CoDH chair Brian Webster-Henderson said: ‘The council will continue to call for the introduction of a maintenance grant for healthcare students and consideration of loan forgiveness in return for service.’

The government also announced new funding of £1.5 billion for social care in 2020-21, but the figure was dismissed by public service think tank Reform as ‘not even a sticking plaster given the scale of the funding gap’.

Chancellor Sajid Javid said the spending would provide a ‘solid foundation to protect the stability of the system next year’.

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