Nurses criticise ‘confusing’ colour-coded uniform

By Andrea Downey

The colour scheme for a national uniform for nurses in England has been revealed, with blue the chosen colour for nurses and nursing associates.

The national uniform aims to standardise workwear in the health service to make it easier to distinguish between members of different healthcare teams in the NHS.

It also aims to make it easier for patients to understand different NHS roles and responsibilities.

The national uniform extends to midwives, pharmacists and allied health professionals. Each profession has a colour unique to them.

But nurses and other healthcare professionals criticised the colours as being ‘confusing’ for not distinguishing between registered nurses or different bands.

Many took to social media saying there was no clear category for sisters, ward managers or specialist nurses. Others called for a system to differentiate between staff on band 5, 6 and 7 to help identify the skills and experience in each setting.

Quick guide to the colours

- Nurses: hospital blue with a navy trim
- Nursing associates: sky blue with a sky-blue trim
- Nursing practitioners: royal blue with a navy trim
- Matron: purple with a navy trim
- Healthcare assistants or support workers: lilac with a navy trim
- Head of department: black with a red trim

In response NHS Supply Chain (NHSSC), which is overseeing the uniform introduction, said the uniforms were deliberately designed to be generic so each can represent a variety of roles.

It confirmed a variety of jobs will be represented by one colour and work was under way to determine the clinically appropriate way to categorise and therefore colour-code roles.

NHSSC uniform procurement lead Kevin Chidlow told Nursing Standard: ‘The descriptions and titles used for the colourways were designed to be generic so that a variety of roles can go into the colour scheme.

‘We are actively engaging with trusts and senior stakeholders to understand where it is clinically appropriate for professions to align to the chosen colourways. This will then form the basis of national guidance. We will continue to listen to feedback and engage accordingly.’

The uniform is expected to be available in the NHS in England by summer 2024.

Nurses in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been wearing standardised uniforms for several years.

Barrister appointed to review claims of toxic culture at NMC

An employment and equality lawyer will lead investigations into claims of racism, sexism and toxic culture at the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The nursing regulator has appointed Ijeoma Omambala KC to review claims that fitness to practise cases have been mishandled, especially those involving racism, discrimination, sexual misconduct and child protection. She will lead a concurrent investigation into how complaints about allegations were handled.

Separately, the regulator is under investigation by the Charity Commission after serious allegations about the working environment at the regulator were reported.

NMC chief executive Andrea Sutcliffe said in a statement she had reflected deeply on the concerns raised by an unnamed source in the Independent newspaper.

She said: ‘I’m more determined than ever for the NMC to fully embed a safe and inclusive working environment that supports all our colleagues to thrive, and delivers effectively on our primary purpose of protecting the public.’

The Independent first reported that an internal unpublished report found a culture of fear in the NMC, with staff fearful of owning up to mistakes, was putting the public at risk because nurses who are not fit to practise are being left on the register without sanction.

In 2008, then Labour health minister Sir Ben Bradshaw commissioned a report by the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence – later the Public Standards Authority – in response to allegations of bullying and racism at the NMC.

Sir Ben told Nursing Standard: ‘I am pleased action is being taken and am hopeful that improvements can be made.’

rcni.com/national-uniform-colour

rcni.com/nmc-investigation