

Nursing Education

Get it Right - RIGHT SKILLS

The very nature of ill health for which nurses care has changed. Longer lives and improved medical interventions means that caring for ill health effectively has become a more complex process requiring enhanced skills. In 2004 Wales moved to all-graduate entry to the nursing profession to meet these changing needs. This has proven to be tremendously successful increasing student retention and the quality of care. Other countries in the UK are now following this example.

Nurses in Wales undertake a 3 year undergraduate programme leading to a BSc (Hons.) Nursing. Midwifery is also available leading to Bachelor in Midwifery (Hons.) Nursing students in Wales are supported by a student bursary – another excellent Wales initiative. However nursing students are usually older than other students and often have children to look after. They are also required as part of their course to work on a ward during what would be holiday time for other students. Both of these factors mean that nursing students face considerable financial hardship.

All nursing students share a common foundation first year. The following 2 years are in the nursing branch they have chosen i.e. Mental Health, Adult, Child or Learning Disability. There are 3 modules per year and each module is 50% theory and 50% practice. In their experience with practice nursing students are supported by clinical mentors. The student must achieve a pass in both aspects of each module to progress.

The role of the clinical mentor is vital yet often they are given no support in this extra role which in turn means the role can be difficult to recruit to. Equally the role of the nurse educator within the higher education institutions is essential to the NHS yet remarkably little

thought is given by Government to the recruitment of future nurse educators.

Once a nurse has completed an undergraduate degree in nursing they are eligible to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (the regulatory body). In order to reregister with the NMC (which a nurse must do annually) evidence of current clinical practice or of updating clinical knowledge is required.

A nurse can work in many different specialities, in the community or in hospitals. This initial degree provides for transferable nursing skills. However some nurses may choose to undertake further specialist studies.

Postgraduate programmes are designed for those who are registered nurses and midwives, all the degree schemes are modular and allow students to select modules reflecting their personal need. There is opportunity for appropriately qualified nurses to engage in postgraduate research e.g. MPhil or PhD. These higher research degrees enable nurses to study a particular topic in depth.

A nurse can also go on to undertake a further BSc or a module at Masters level in district nursing, health visiting, school nursing or practice nursing.

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KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- The Welsh Assembly Government must maintain the nursing student bursary.
- The RCN believes that every newly qualified nurse should be guaranteed an offer of employment from NHS Wales and that an offer of support and mentorship similar to that offered by the Scottish Flying Start scheme should be considered.
- Nursing students should be eligible for student loans in the same way as other students.
- Receipt of the nursing student bursary should not adversely affect benefit payments.
- The role of clinical mentors for students should be supported (e.g. by extra support for their clinical duties).
- The clinical practice of nurse educators as well as their academic profile needs to be recognised and rewarded within higher education.