

# Advanced & Specialist Nursing Roles

Get it Right - RIGHT NUMBERS

**There are many different titles for specialist or advanced nursing roles. For example, nurse practitioner (or advanced nurse practitioner), clinical nurse specialist or specialist nurse, and nurse consultant.**

Specialist Nurses work in a defined area of practice – they may work at advanced levels in a specialist role or simply focus their practice in one particular area. The role is often about patient communication, teaching and support of self management of disease and illness, reviewing medication, and organising the patient pathway and access to other services. Patients with long term conditions frequently identify the specialist nurse as one of the most important healthcare professionals.

Nurse practitioners in primary care span first contact, diagnosis and treatment; and also the management of long term conditions. These roles are ideally suited to providing primary or unscheduled care services such as emergency care or walk – in centres.

Nurse consultants undertake a wide range of activities but are often the lead nurse in a particular area of nursing expertise and care. There are currently only 28 appointed nurse consultant in Wales. This is very disappointing. Alongside the substantial evidence emerging from England, a favourable evaluation of the role of the first 11 nurse consultant posts in Wales has already been undertaken.

When surveyed by the RCN, Advanced and Specialist Nurses were virtually unanimous that their professional judgement is respected by nursing colleagues (94%), and by other health care staff (93%). But although their judgement is respected, their role may not be understood - 23% of those who make referrals, have had them refused because they are a nurse rather than a doctor. Similarly a third (33%) who order investigations had been refused on the same grounds.

Advanced and Specialist Nurses make a difference to patients lives and have a beneficial impact on the health service they work in. The roles bring many benefits to patients including continuity of care, access to expertise, improved clinical outcomes, and an excellent relationship between patient and healthcare professional. Another area of benefit is the accessibility and completeness of the services provided. Patients are able to access the services quickly and because nurses have the authority to act, they are often diagnosed and treated more quickly than would other wise have been the case, receiving a 'whole package of care' rather than having to be referred on. Patients thus spend less time on a waiting list and in many cases have longer appointments with a health professional with whom they have a relationship of trust.

## KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- The Welsh Assembly Government should increase the number of specialist nurses, nurse practitioners and nurse consultants in Wales.
- The potential for advanced and specialist nursing roles should be mainstreamed into consideration during service planning.

