

Nursing in Primary Care

Get it Right - PUBLIC HEALTH PUBLIC SERVICE

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Primary Care nurses work in a variety of settings addressing public health, prevention, treatment and continuing care needs of their patients and populations. They are trusted by the public, and they can be found in all their roles giving advice to patients and carers.

Practice Nurses (most often employed by General Practitioners) undertake a range of tasks, including travel health, the management of long-term conditions and cervical cytology. Nurses undertake a two year course to become Nurse Practitioners and then can be responsible for nurse led clinics, minor illness, triage, supplementary or independent prescribing.

The Royal College of Nursing believes that accessible primary health care is vital to the prosperity and wellbeing of the community. Investment in maintaining the health of people in the community will save costly expenditure on secondary hospital care. Accessible primary care services are extremely important and whilst the current system of independently contracted GPs is extremely effective at providing primary care services there are clearly areas where this system is not effective alone and could easily be supplemented by the provision of salaried nurse practitioners or the development of nurse-led walk-in centres which have proven incredibly effective in England in meeting health needs.

It is also necessary to strengthen and develop the primary care services currently provided by nurses employed by GPs. Practice nurses employed by GPs do not automatically fall under Agenda for Change – the terms and conditions package for NHS staff. Nurses employed by GPs often find it difficult to access continuous professional development and we would urge steps to be taken to rectify this.

Nurses who can independently prescribe can speed up patient care considerably and also strengthen the clinical accountability for prescription. Potentially based in a well developed general practice or health clinic specialist nurses and nurse consultants should be able to lead diagnostic clinics with the ability to admit directly to hospitals.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- Information on the numbers of practice nurses should be collated and the numbers of nurse practitioners and nurse consultants should be increased.
- Access to continuous professional development should be monitored and strengthened for practice nurses particularly in the areas of chronic disease management and prescribing.
- The adoption of Agenda for Change terms and conditions for nurses in primary care should be strongly encouraged.
- Sexual health advice services across Wales, particularly for the young should be strengthened and a funding programme established.
- Where appropriate Local Health Boards should develop nurse-led primary healthcare or walk-in centres.

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