

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR COMMUNITY NURSING IN SCOTLAND

Background

Community nursing in Scotland is at a crossroads. The community nursing workforce is ageing rapidly, with 30% of our nurses reaching retirement age within ten years [Buchan, J., O'May, F., & McCann, D. *Older...but wiser?* (2008)]. The profession is uncertain of its future, yet demand for community health services is expected to increase.

With the drive to shift the balance of care from hospitals to the community and the publication of many new health policies from the Scottish Government, it is clear that community health and healthcare services need to change.

The Review of Nursing in the Community (RONC) in 2006 proposed the development of a new community nursing role replacing the more specialist roles of school nurses, district nurses and health visitors. This model is being piloted within some health board areas and these pilots are not now due to be evaluated until mid 2010.

At the same time, some other health boards are developing different models and making changes to how nursing care is delivered in communities, in response to local needs. In addition, other parts of the community workforce, such as mental health nursing, are facing separate reforms.

All of these different approaches have led to a fragmentation of services and nursing roles which, in addition to the implications for patients, has implications for the future of professional registration, education and workforce mobility.

RCN Scotland's response to the changes

RCN Scotland has taken a solution-focused approach to the future of community nursing and published *A Sustainable Future: The RCN Vision for Community Nursing in Scotland* in April 2009. This is a result of extensive consultation with around 700 nurses, other healthcare professionals and patients in addition to an in-depth analysis of Government policies and is the culmination of work that has been taking place for more than a year.

We want our vision to support a new way forward for nurses and patients in all of Scotland's communities.

A sustainable future – the RCN Scotland vision for community nursing

A sustainable and vibrant nursing profession working with communities is key to the future of Scottish healthcare delivery.

- Community nursing services must allow local flexibility to meet local need, within a clear and straightforward National Framework for Community Nursing in Scotland. We are not proposing a single model of community nursing service delivery across the whole of Scotland. Our proposed National Framework would simply ensure that the core values and job profiles of community nursing retain national currency, allowing services to be configured to deliver locally, from Glasgow to Shetland.
- Within the National Framework, community nursing would evolve in two fields:
 - one working with children, young people, and families, from pre-conception through to transfer to adult services; *and*
 - the other focusing on the needs of adults and older adults.

This is in contrast to the Government's current approach in developing a generic Community Health Nurse from existing specialist roles to cross the full age spectrum from 0-100. RCN believes it remains important to take account of the particular skills needed to work with distinct age groups, thus enabling patients to receive the most appropriate community nursing care.

- Nurses should be part of multi-disciplinary community health teams designed to meet the different needs of children and adults. The specific make up teams will be determined by local health needs but should cover the full health spectrum, from health promotion to end of life care.
- Each team must have within it the necessary physical *and* mental health care abilities needed to deliver holistic care. The Government's current RONC review is limited to three existing nursing roles, not including mental health or learning disability nurses. This is not sufficient to ensure joined-up and patient-centred services are delivered locally.

- Community nursing must be reinvigorated as an exciting career by providing flexible post-graduate education programmes. Our proposals do not focus on a single level of nursing, as RONC has tended to do, but sets out a vision for the whole community profession from health care support workers to nurse consultants. The worrying decline in postgraduate trainees in community nursing could be reversed if nurses were inspired by the new possibilities of a community career and places were adequately funded and supported.
- Building on our consultation, RCN believes there is merit in exploring the possibility of a new generic *staff* nurse within a modernised community nursing career pathway. This could provide a valuable source of flexible nursing capacity and capability within teams, improve integration and expose new staff nurses to wider experiences as they decide their future career. Whilst such an opportunity may be appropriate at staff nurse level, we do not support such a role replacing senior and specialist nursing roles as is proposed in the RONC project.
- Strong nursing leadership is needed to plan change and take forward a new vision for community nursing. However, too often past reforms have stripped out nurse leadership positions or given too little attention to the development of nurse leader roles. The RONC project, with its focus on Level 6 nurses, has also given insufficient attention to the place of more senior nursing staff. Nursing leadership must be expanded and re-invigorated at an early stage if change is to be successfully led and managed.
- Health services must be planned and delivered with the needs of users, rather than providers, at their heart. Whilst the ethos, core job profiles and educational provision for nursing must retain a national focus, local needs must be met by ensuring health boards and CHPs are empowered to configure the skill mix and location of teams, with the engagement of staff, patients and the public.
- Nurses and the wider health team must be provided with resources, administrative support and appropriate IT in order for them to care effectively. All reforms must realistically reflect the staff, financial and other resources needed for success.

Developing and delivering this vision for the future of community nursing is a complex task - it is **not** a quick fix that can be summarised in a simple diagram and implemented overnight.

Next steps

RCN Scotland is asking the Scottish Government to develop our vision and ensure that there is a sustainable future for community nursing that meets growing health needs. A refreshed approach is needed. We are calling on the Scottish Government to work in partnership to:

- Develop a National Framework for Community Nursing in Scotland;
- Design integrated community nursing structures based on local health needs;
- Ensure shared ownership of community nursing;
- Build a modernised community nursing career pathway, supported by flexible education options;
- Invest in community nursing leadership; *and*
- Provide resources and infrastructure that reflect future demands on community nursing.

The full report, *A Sustainable Future: The RCN Vision for Community Nursing in Scotland*, together with an analysis of our consultation responses, contained in *Voices on the Vision for Community Nursing in Scotland*, can be found at: www.rcn.org.uk/community_nursing_scotland

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