

# Free to Lead Free to Care Improving the Patient Experience

## Get it Right - RIGHT WORK PLACE

**Nurses are the single largest workforce in the NHS in Wales with over 21,000 registered nurses employed. Nurses are central to the patient's experience and the Ward Sister or Charge Nurse is responsible for managing much of that experience.**

In June 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government launched the Free to Lead Free to Care Report. The Royal College of Nursing chaired the Empowering Ward Sister/Charge Group that produced this report. This report contained 35 recommendations to improve the patient experience, with particular regard to dignity, cleanliness and nutrition. Since ward sisters and charge nurses were involved in drawing up the report it means that these recommendations come from an understanding of the real issues at ward level and that they are also practical for ward sisters and charge nurses to implement.

The recommendations include:

- Dedicated cleaning teams and a ward housekeeper working under the supervision of a ward sister or charge nurse in every hospital ward.
  - To ensure the ward sister/charge nurse is able to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness on the wards the NHS in Wales should adopt the Cleaning Operatives Proficiency Certificate award from the British Institute of Cleaning Science as the national minimum standard of training for ward cleaners.
  - New all-Wales uniforms for nursing staff and an all-Wales nursing dress code to enable patients to better distinguish different staff grades and responsibilities and see who is in charge. The design of these uniforms have now been chosen and hopefully the public will now begin to see this uniform in use.
  - Changing facilities should be provided for staff to change in on arrival and departure and more frequently in between if required. All NHS health organisations should have stockpiles of uniforms to ensure their availability to nursing staff on a 24-hour basis.
- All new hospitals have single-sex wards, and existing hospitals with mixed gender wards to divide those wards and provide separate bathroom facilities; and
  - Ward sisters and charge nurses to have the authority to 'protect' mealtimes and determine visiting times in the best interests of patient care.
  - An All-Wales approved ward sisters/charge nurses development programme is being established to address human resource and managerial skills and the maintaining of standards around issues such as cleanliness and nutrition/hydration on the ward.

Recommendations are however only the start of the process. RCN Wales would like to see all of these recommendations now implemented. Moreover there is certainly scope to transfer the principles of empowerment, leadership and improving the patient experience into other areas such as community nursing. The Welsh Assembly Government should explore these.

The title of the report is Free to Lead Free to Care. Nursing is about leadership and it is about caring. The two must be inseparable. If we do not care then we are not nursing and we must as nurses lead the way in ensuring caring is at the heart of what we do in the NHS today.

## KEY POLICY ACTION

- The Welsh Assembly Government should take steps to ensure the implementation of Free to Lead Free to Care.

