

## CONSERVATIVE DEBATE: HEALTH WEDNESDAY 18 JANUARY 2017

### Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

### Background

Health inequalities remain a significant problem in Scotland. The reasons behind it, its manifestations and potential solutions are complex and wide-ranging.

In general, deprivation and social inequality are central drivers of health inequalities; this means that everything from employment status, income, education, quality of housing and wider community services can have an impact on the quality and length of people's lives.

For nurses, health inequalities present a real challenge. Nurses treat patients with multiple long-term conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung problems, dementia, arthritis, etc., and assist with wider problems linked to social deprivation. They are confronted daily with the consequences of social conditions on the health and well-being of the communities they care for.

In many circumstances nurses are not only addressing the direct health needs of patients, but trying to promote positive physical and mental health where the social and physical environment may be high unemployment, high crime, a lack of opportunity and a lack of green space.

### Taking decisions for generations to come

People need to know they can access the right care in the right place whenever they need it, whether that's in hospital, at home or in their community. But to deliver that Scotland is going to have to work in new ways.

The RCN manifesto ahead of the 2016 elections '[Nursing Scotland's Future: professional voices, practical solutions](#)' set out five key issues which the RCN believes need to be addressed during this session of the Scottish Parliament.

One of the principal calls of the RCN's manifesto was that decisions about health and wellbeing are made to shape health care for generations to come, rather than focussing on short term goals.

Undoubtedly, this means working to address the root causes of health inequalities and to further the preventative health agenda. Scotland must therefore move away from looking at resources and budgets in an isolated way and over short-term periods if its health issues are to be addressed and ensure that its health services are there for generations to come.

Boards are under huge pressure to meet core HEAT targets and standards, but despite cross-party commitments to invest in prevention and shift the balance of care to community settings, the most high profile HEAT targets continue to focus attention on hospital services. And HEAT targets are just one of the confusing myriad of often competing measures the NHS has to achieve.

If our health care services are to be sustainable, it needs to be simple for health boards and other service providers to report on how they are performing and easy for the public and politicians to assess whether services are doing what we want them to do – and doing it well. And it needs to be done in a way that supports improved health outcomes for individuals for generations to come.

If Scotland continues to deliver care in the same way as it does now, the demands on health care services will outstrip Scotland's ability to pay for them. Tough decisions on what to invest in or disinvest from will need to be made, in partnership with the public, with staff and across all political parties.

### Nursing in our communities

Nurses can influence the health of communities in many ways. They can carry out direct interventions for individuals and families; assess a patient's needs and help to ensure that the right services are provided.

RCN Scotland's report [Nursing at the Edge](#) highlights examples of the leading role that nurses take in tackling health inequalities.

Nurses can be involved in early intervention to prevent the development of ill health; they can promote healthy behaviours working with patients and the wider community; and they can help to deliver public health measures as well as being advocates for change.

They can also make sure that vulnerable groups are prioritised; and provide leadership as well as supporting community empowerment.

In 2016 RCN Scotland published [Five Years On](#) - a review of the transfer of prison health care from the Scottish Prison Service to NHS Scotland. This report looks specifically at the health care provisions in place, and improvements which can be made for one of society's most vulnerable groups.

The report concluded that the original aims and objectives of the transfer from the Scottish Prison Service to NHS Scotland have not been met. This leaves one of society's most vulnerable groups without the health care that they require, which is a missed opportunity to improve the outcomes for these individuals. Missing such an opportunity also impacts negatively on wider society.

### **Mental health**

Mental health nursing has often been regarded as a 'Cinderella' service, often under-resourced in comparison to other areas of nursing. RCN Scotland is pleased to see mental health and mental health nursing being discussed and debated widely.

In November 2016 RCN Scotland published a report '[The transformation of adult mental health care in Scotland: Learning from the past to support integration reform](#)'.

The report is based on one-to-one interviews with nurses and looks at what can be learned from their experiences of service transformation. The report concludes that those leading Scotland's health and social care partnerships could learn a lot from how change was managed when Scotland's mental health services shifted from large institutions to community-based services, with the person at the centre of their care.

Alongside the report, RCN Scotland also launched three short films which describe – through the voices of individual nursing staff – what adult mental health nursing is like in Scotland today and what it may look like in the future.

The films highlight how nurses and health care support workers in the sector work with people to achieve recovery and better outcomes for individuals on their own terms.

They show how mental health services have been absolutely transformed, with the vast majority of mental health nurses now working in the community, as part of multidisciplinary teams.

### **Universal health visiting services**

Nurses play a central role in helping prevent health inequalities by supporting families and children in the early years. The universal health visiting service is designed to provide support to all families regardless of circumstances.

In a feedback exercise with health visitor members in 2016, concerns were raised about capacity in at least five health boards.

Health visitors can have a hugely positive impact on the lives of children in Scotland, and on the families with which they work. They are a crucial element of Scotland's community nursing workforce, but they must be adequately resourced and invested in to ensure that they are able to provide services fit for the future.

### **Further information sources**

If you would like any further information please contact Sarah Atherton, Parliamentary and Media Officer, by email at [sarah.atherton@rcn.org.uk](mailto:sarah.atherton@rcn.org.uk) or by telephone 0131 662 6172.