Gender and nursing as a profession: valuing nurses and paying them their worth

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Why we commissioned the research

• RCN research consistently shows members feel undervalued

• Pay does not match:
  ▪ level of responsibility, autonomy, accountability
  ▪ stress, pressure and demands
  ▪ skills and levels of education and training
  ▪ increasing scope of practice

• Alarm at lack of voice in responses to staffing shortages and ‘failures’ in care
Why we commissioned the research

- At least 40,000 vacancies in England NHS alone
- Supply and demand should influence wages
- What’s so different about nursing?
Report structure

Literature review - construction of nursing
Quantitative analysis – pay and reward
Interviews with key stakeholders – how did we get here - what can be done?
Literature Review

• How is pay shaped and constrained by the impact of nursing history and status as female-dominated and defined profession?
• Through two lenses – gender and professional status
• Definitions of professions eg Witz (1990), Evetts (2003), Kelan (2008)
Professional status

1. Occupational boundaries/closure
   - NMC registration
   - Tensions – definition v medicine
   - New roles

2. Controlling knowledge claims
   - Nursing led research
   - Blurred lines with other fields

3. Controls over patterns of work, work processes and volume of work
   - Highly structured based on service needs
There are 40,000+ vacancies in NHS in England alone
Why has this not translated into higher wages?
Pay is not just a price – it is a social practice
Quantitative Study

- Analysis of LFS and ASHE data on earnings across all nursing staff, alongside other health care professions (SOC 22 includes managers, doctors, AHPs)
- Nursing pay among the lowest across all health care professionals
- Low standard deviation - little variation in earnings, so low scope for progression and higher earnings across career
- Weekly mean earnings: £526.58 SD £182.24
- AHPs: £550.95 SD £202.16
Decomposition: If women worked the same hours as men they would earn £102.60 a week more.

-£1.34  -£1.01  -£0.80  £0.00  £0.20  £0.22  £2.22  £5.63  £102.60

Years worked for organisation  Age  Temporary contract  Shift and premium payments  Private sector  Not for profit  Sex  Weekly paid overtime hours  Basic paid hours
Qualitative Study

- Confirmed outdated perceptions of nursing, in wider society and in nurses’ own self-concept - this undermines professional identity
- Failure to recognise the profession as safety-critical
- Registered nursing role diluted and overwhelmed
Conclusions/recommendations

• Is nursing an attractive graduate career – do pay and conditions, working conditions, working environments and advancement opportunities match what people from work?

• Health and social care organisations need to recognise they employ a female-dominated workforce and use resources to help individuals work in the most productive way possible - at all life stages.

• Do job descriptions fully and accurately and fully measure the productive value of all aspects of nursing – emotional, productive, technical, cognitive skills?
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