

## SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVES DEBATE: NHS SCOTLAND STAFFING CRISIS

### 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 around 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

### Background

Rising demand and the financial constraints which are facing our health boards are putting a huge amount of pressure on nursing staff.

More older people requiring ever-more complex care means that the demand on our health services is going up, impacting the workload of nursing staff.

Without changes to the way health services are delivered, there's a risk that Scotland could return to the 'boom and bust' years, where health boards targeted the nursing workforce for cuts, simply to balance their books.

### Health board budget pressures

Health boards are being asked to make savings to balance the books. This is not sustainable. If we are going to meet the growing demand on our health service we have to do things differently, without putting patient care at risk.

If we want health and social care services fit for the future, we cannot continue to deliver services in the same way. Difficult decisions will have to be made by about how and where money is invested.

In a demand-led service, we need to look at new models of care, to enable people – particularly the growing population of older people – to be supported to stay at home and self-manage their own care. Radical change is needed and all

stakeholders, including politicians and health and care professionals, must be willing to put vested interests to one side and work together for a common cause – to ensure our NHS is sustainable for the future.

### Building 24/7 primary care

Nurses are already a hugely important part of primary care teams, delivering services in both in-hours and out-of-hours settings.

### General practice nursing

In general practice, nurses support patients with ongoing care out of hospital as well playing a key role in core public health activities and supporting patients to manage their own long-term conditions.

General practice nurse consultations rose by 31% from 6.1 million to 8.0 million between 2003/4 and 2012/13. GPs and practice-employed nurses in Scotland had an estimated 24.2 million consultations with patients in 2012/13. Overall, this is a rise of 2.5 million compared to 2003/04, when Practice Team Information recording started.

### Community, health visiting & district nursing

The Government's 2020 vision is for more care to be delivered at home or in a homely setting. This requires significant investment if nursing is to co-ordinate integrated, round-the-clock community care and patients are to enjoy safe, effective, joined-up care at home.

Community, health visiting and district nursing teams offer core health care services across communities, delivering care to people of all ages in their homes and local areas. The Scottish Government is already investing in health visiting, which provides universal services for children up to age five. The investment will help to support additional workload relating to not only the Named Person Service but also other provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. But with a high proportion of the health visiting workforce reaching retirement age in the next decade, investment will need to be ongoing.

Investment is now also required in community and district nursing to support the transformation of services, particularly for older people who are living longer with much more complex health needs. Only by investing in this nursing workforce will services be sustainable and responsive round the clock.

### **Advanced nurse practitioners**

Advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs) are highly qualified nurses, with the expertise, knowledge and experience to make complex decisions about care. In the community they work hand-in-hand with GPs, other nurses, paramedics and allied health professionals, like physiotherapists.

ANPs operate as senior clinical decision makers, improving sustainability by ensuring that patients receive swift access to the right care. They free up medical colleagues to focus on those areas in which their expertise is most required within the team. ANPs are already delivering primary care services across Scotland.

ANPs are an asset to the future of primary healthcare service delivery and we need to plan for their future, as well as for all other professions within primary care teams, in a co-ordinated way.

For ANPs a key part of this is developing nationally agreed standards for training, education and career development so that there is consistency and a clear understanding of the competencies that nurses working in these roles need to have.

We endorse the Chief Nursing Officer's position, reflected in the Out of Hours Review report, that there must be a clear training route for ANPs.

### **Vacancies**

While the number of nursing and midwifery staff in post has gone up slightly over the last year, ISD figures show that the increase in staff is not keeping pace with demand: the vacancy rate at June 2016 was 4.2%, an increase from 3.7% over the year and, even more worrying, almost 600 posts had been vacant for three months or more.

An increase in bank and agency staff is an expensive temporary fix, does not address staffing shortages and is not sustainable in the long term.

While we acknowledge that work is being done nationally to make changes, the way in which services are delivered needs to change urgently. Health boards can only do so much within their current budgets.

### **Conclusion**

Scotland's health and care services are creaking at the seams. Scotland must look at different ways of delivering services to ensure that people get the care and support they need and new ways of measuring success. Investment in nursing and other staff to enable this to happen is key. This will ensure that the NHS is put on a sustainable footing for the future whilst also meeting the Government's 2020 vision.

Against the backdrop of funding decisions by health boards based on making savings, increased demand for services and a health reform agenda, there is no single workforce plan supported by clear data to build on for the future.

The current reform agenda, which is seeing the beginning of change in areas such as primary care, trauma services and elective services, will require a single coherent workforce plan if sustainable health services for the future are to be built. While data sources are available for some of these areas, it may require new data sources to be developed to support such a workforce plan.

A significant shift in resources from acute to primary care will also be needed if we are to build a sustainable primary care service.

### **Further information sources**

If you would like any further information please contact Fiona Milne, Parliamentary and Media Officer, by email at [Fiona.Milne@rcn.org.uk](mailto:Fiona.Milne@rcn.org.uk) or by telephone 0131 662 6192.