

RCN Policy Unit

Policy Briefing 06/2007

Modernising Nursing Careers

April 2007

Introduction

This briefing paper sets out the background and ongoing work of the Modernising Nursing Careers initiative. It also highlights some of the issues for future pre and post registration education and career pathways.

Modernising Nursing Careers

Modernising Nursing Careers (MNC)¹ is a four country UK-wide publication published in 2006. The RCN was involved in the development of this document which draws on, and references, previous RCN work on the future nurse².

There are 4 key recommendations of MNC:

- Develop a Competent and Flexible Nursing Workforce

“The Health Departments will work with others to explore whether changes are needed to the content and level of the pre-registration programme. Initially we will scope the changes that have already been made to support new patterns of care, and flexible careers.

The Health Departments will work with stakeholders to map nursing roles and competencies to the national NHS careers framework with proposals for a competency passport scheme.

The Health Departments will work with stakeholders to review the career pathways and educational preparation required for specialist and advanced roles.”

- Update Career Pathways and Career Choices

“The Health Departments will work with key stakeholders to review the career pathways and educational preparation required for nursing in the community, focusing on public health, long term conditions and acute care. This will include supporting acute nurses to follow services from hospital to community, and in Scotland reviewing nursing in the community.

The Health Departments will initiate a review of educator roles and career paths spanning service and education....Tools to support career choices, such as career navigation aids, will be produced.

¹ Departments of Health (2006) *Modernising Nursing Careers* www.dh.gov.uk/cno

² RCN (2004) *The Future Nurse: The RCN Vision Explained* RCN: London

The UK chief nursing officers will work with the new and existing independent sector providers on supporting modern careers for nurses.”

- Prepare Nurses to Lead in a Changed Health Care System

“The Health Departments will work with key stakeholders to provide information for the profession on the nursing responsibilities of leading and co-ordinating care.

The Health Departments will work with stakeholders to nurture ability and develop fast track schemes for future nurse leaders.”

- Modernise the Image of Nursing and Nursing Careers

“The Health Departments will work with stakeholders to agree and communicate key messages about nursing and nursing careers, including information for the public on ‘what nurses can do these days’.”

The health policy drivers underpinning this work include:

- More health and nursing care to be delivered in community settings.
- Increasing use of e-technology and informatics in health care delivery.
- Acute hospital in-patient care to move towards more short stay and critical care interventions.
- Growing plurality of health care providers, for example, social enterprise models.
- The need to focus more in the future on the management of chronic and long term illness, and public health.

This means that nurses and nursing in the future must be prepared for practice so that:

- They can work in a variety of settings and employment models with knowledge and skills that are transferable
- Have community practice as a core of their educational preparation

Current MNC Work Priorities

A Modernising Nursing Careers UK Coalition Group, chaired by Chris Beasley, Chief Nursing Officer (England) with membership of all UK Chief Nursing Officers, has been set up to implement the reports recommendations. The RCN is a member of this UK wide group along with

other external stakeholders including the RCM, CPHVA/AMICUS, NMC, NHS Employers, UNISON, Council of Deans, Skills for Health. This group met for the first time in November 2006.

A key current focus of work is scoping options for pre and post registration education and career pathways. A 'one-off' UK wide 'education consensus event' was held in February 2007 to scope key principles for the following:

- Pre-registration education
- Preparation for specialist and advanced nursing roles
- Nurse educator roles

Following this there have been regional workshops in England, and events in the other countries, to explore education and career pathways for the future with practicing nurses and HCAs. There have also been two workshops to look specifically at the future for nursing in community settings. The RCN has been represented at all of these.

A discussion paper on nurse education and career pathways is planned for September 2007. The Nursing and Midwifery Council is the lead to take this work forward.

The RCN Response

The RCN policy documents *The Future Nurse: The RCN Vision Explained*³ and *The Future Nurse: The Future of Nurse Education*⁴ set out a similar future scenario for health care delivery and nursing work within that. These suggest that nursing in the future will need to be:

- Delivered by nursing teams which include Health Care Assistants⁵ as acknowledged members of the nursing team and nursing family
- Integrated across the patient care pathway so that it stretches across institutional boundaries and care settings, and the continuum of health care from public health to management of acute episodes of illness including emotional and mental health
- Focus more on management and self-management of chronic illness and health improvement

³ RCN (2004) *The Future Nurse: The RCN Vision Explained* RCN; London

⁴ RCN (2004) *The Future Nurse: The Future for Nurse Education* RCN; London

⁵ Exact titles vary, for example, health care support workers, assistant nurses, nursing auxiliaries

- Graduate status at the point of first nurse registration with developed pathways for advanced nursing practice

They also set out a future whereby some nursing teams practise more as generalists – that is across population groups and illness categories – with support from more specialist nursing teams as appropriate. However, generalism and specialism – or the levels and competencies of these domains of practice – are not specifically defined in the documents.

RCN work on MNC is led by the Future Nurse Future Workforce project which is a UK wide cross organisational group that brings together the expertise and knowledge of a range of RCN departments and countries. Currently we are engaged in:

- Scoping the evidence base including ‘soft’ evidence for the outcomes of pre registration education for nursing practice
- Exploring funding options for nurse education in the future
- Looking at developments in Europe on nurse education and practice
- Commissioning work that models future workforce scenarios for nursing including numbers⁶
- Exploring and refining previous RCN work on competency levels for advanced practice - both advanced generalist practice, for example nurse practitioners in primary care, and advanced specialist practice, for example nurse practitioners in cancer care, clinical nurse specialists, some consultant nurses.

What Are The Issues?

The fundamental issue that must underpin work on taking forward MNC is that we produce nurses fit for practice in the future, at both new registrant and advanced practice levels. This is important, not only in terms of meeting public and patient needs, expectations and views. But also in terms of the viability of the future nursing workforce as recognised key leaders and deliverers of health care in the future (and subsequent commissioning of nurse education and nurse employment). It is also important in terms of future nursing recruitment and ensuring nursing is seen as an attractive career option.

Other issues that flow from the above are:

- Getting the right model for pre registration nurse education

⁶ At a general level rather than for example the numbers of consultant nurses needed

- Developing career frameworks that enable nurses to both progress their careers *and* have in-built flexibility and transferability to enable them to move between different career portfolios and employment settings
- Ensuring post registration education facilitates and enhances the above
- Ensuring that there is a proper framework to develop and support HCAs and assistant practitioners, including progression into registered nursing if they wish
- Movement towards more future nursing roles based in the community

The detail of the above is under discussion and no definitive position has been agreed within or outside the RCN. Some of the *options* floated are:

- Community settings to be the core of pre registration education placements⁷.
- Post registration education to become modular and incorporate more work based learning.
- Pre registration education to become more generalist in that students achieve a level of competency with all population groups and a broad spectrum of care pathways.

Next Steps

Implementation of Modernising Nursing Careers is at an early stage of discussion and development. RCN members will be alerted to further developments when they arise – including progress of work within the Future Nurse Future Workforce Project. A further update will appear on this website in the near future.

RCN Policy Unit April 07

⁷ which would mean capacity for teaching and mentoring would need to be increased