

Community nursing plans will add to staff pressure

Government blueprint sets out wide-ranging district nursing service model to meet needs of frail people

By Sally Gillen

UNIONS FEAR that shortages of district nurses could undermine the government blueprint for nursing in the community published last month.

The document says that nurses working in the community are increasingly giving complex care to large numbers of frail older people, often providing a broad range of services including end of life care.

It sets out a wide-ranging district nursing service model that includes working with community matrons to provide palliative care and nutrition advice, and working with patients to help them care for themselves.

Department of Health (DH) director of nursing Viv Bennett said: 'District nursing is misunderstood. Many people think it is about giving medication to older people or dealing with leg ulcers, when actually nurses now provide an extended range of care.'

The DH is developing the use of technology in community care, but Professor Bennett said that some nurses were not confident about using it while others reported that it was not always suitable for nursing.

The government wants Health Education England, which oversees the training of NHS staff, and the new local education and training boards to work with higher education institutions to ensure district nurses have the right skills.

RCN director of nursing and service delivery Janet Davies said she welcomed the document but warned that the dwindling number of district nurses and the increasing demand for community nursing could mean that the quality of care and services is hard to achieve.

A survey published by the RCN in May 2012 revealed a 34 per cent drop in

the number of district nurses between 2001 and 2011.

'The problem is that nurses may have 15 minutes allocated for each visit, but it can take some people ten minutes to get to the door,' said Ms Davies. 'Nurses are seeing some very frail, older people with long-term conditions and it takes a long time to care for them.'

She added that community nursing teams are under increasing pressure, reporting that they are understaffed because vacant posts are not being filled to save money.

In addition, cuts to social care packages – a consequence of the crisis in social care funding – are placing extra pressure on nurses, she said.

Professor Bennett conceded that the number of district nurses who undertake specialist training to lead nursing teams had fallen, but the number of other nurses and healthcare support workers in teams has gone up.

An action plan will be published by the DH in March.

<http://tinyurl.com/bd7czxm>

Amount of medications residents take is predictor of mortality

THE FREQUENCY of GP contacts and the number of medications prescribed to care home residents are strong predictors of mortality, according to research.

Investigators from St George's University of London examined predictors of mortality in care home residents in England and Wales compared with community dwellers.

They followed 9,772 care home and 354,306 community residents aged between 65 and 104 years in 293 general practices



Cancer charity's film shows how 'age is just a number'

MACMILLAN CANCER Support has developed a promotional film for its Age Old Excuse campaign to tackle age discrimination in the NHS.

The two-minute film tells the stories of three older people who are defying stereotypes associated with ageing. Ena Mallett, 79, is a 7th dan black belt ju-jitsu practitioner and teaches martial arts. Ruth Flowers, also known as 'Mamy Rock', 72, is a DJ who has played in nightclubs all over the world. Also featured is Professor Geoffrey Palmer who at 72 is a grain scientist. The film ends with actor Sir Patrick Stewart (pictured above), aged 72, stating that 'age is just a number'.

The charity is calling for older people to be offered cancer treatment based on their fitness not their age, and to receive the practical support they need to take it up. <http://tinyurl.com/ageoldexcuse>
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in 2009. Approximately one quarter of care home residents died within one year compared with just over 3 per cent of those in the community.

However, in both settings, mortality was much higher in people receiving 11 or more medications compared with those receiving two or fewer and for people who had six or more GP contacts compared with none.

Lead author Sunil Shah said: 'Our findings should help GPs have timely discussions with patients and relatives about preferences for end of life care.'

The study was published in *Age and Ageing*. doi: 10.1093/ageing/afs174

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