“Limited training places could render district nurses extinct”

Through my experience in community nursing I believe registered nurses in district nursing teams need further academic support and clinical development after being in community practice for one year.

After one year, nurses who are newly qualified or who joined the community from hospital would have completed mandatory and skills-related training. The next stage in development is often linked to leadership but there is still a gap in learning and development. Before becoming a leader, we should be fully competent and confident in our own sphere of practice.

A community development programme, one year on, reinforces learnt skills and directs nurses towards more complex assessment skills such as nursing needs assessments, advanced care plans and risk assessments. These focus on patient safety in their own home and prevention of hospital admissions. In other words, a shift in practice can occur where task-oriented care is dismissed and holistic care is ensured as nurses feel more confident and competent to carry out complex skills.

Research indicates that mortality is lower in areas where nurses are trained to degree level. It is imperative that workforce development is given priority and that nurses are encouraged to be educated to degree level. As well as reassurance and clinical development, a programme offers nurses the opportunity to gain academic credit at either Level 6 or Level 7. This would encourage development towards a district nursing course or a degree in long-term conditions management.

Research commissioned by the Royal College of Nursing and carried out last year by the National Nursing Research Unit predicted that district nurses would become extinct in the next 10 years due to the limited nurse training and high levels of retirement. It is vital we find ways to develop the existing workforce and encourage uptake of district nurse training.

District nurse training is linked to the financial agenda of localities as nurses often have to take a year out at a lower pay scale to complete the training. As a result, part-time district nursing courses are becoming popular. However, it is important to consider the impact of working and developing in the same environment. Creating training after a year in practice enables nurses to develop complex skills. The insight into advanced skills from a course may also encourage nurses to take a step towards the district nursing programme or towards specialising within the community field.

Ensuring staff members practise infection control measures in a consistent way is essential to maintaining patient safety. However, as our expert author on p17 has identified, the first step is to ensure guidelines are presented clearly.

An evaluation of the standard infection control precautions documents used in Scotland found they did not necessarily support a common understanding. Staff felt the documents were hard to access and navigate and were aimed at infection prevention and control specialists.

Our article describes the development of a national policy manual, and details the critical aspects of each infection control precaution. The manual is now being used in Scotland to produce consistency and standard practice, and is being replicated in other countries.

Preventing surgical site infection p12
How long work hours affect alcohol use p21
Reducing harm in enteral feeding p23

Kathryn Godfrey is practice and learning editor of Nursing Times.
kathryn.godfrey@emap.com
Twitter @GodfreyKathryn. Don’t miss the practice blog, go to nursingtimes.net/practiceblog

Neesha Oozageer Gunowa is senior lecturer, community team, Kingston University and St. George’s, University of London

www.nursingtimes.net / Vol 111 No 38 / Nursing Times 16.09.15 11