

News release:

A manifesto for quality nursing in the home from the Queen's Nursing Institute



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The quality of nursing experienced by patients in their own homes is under threat because of 'perverse' workforce and organisational changes, according to community nursing charity the Queen's Nursing Institute. In a position statement setting out the charity's new focus for the next three years, the QNI calls for a number of significant changes to protect the quality of nursing care in the home, including mandatory training for nurses moving into the community, national regulation for health care assistants (HCAs), and an additional level of nursing between HCA and registered nurse.

'The QNI sees good community nursing as the answer to the sustainability of services facing the challenges of an ageing population and increased need for care in the face of a financial crisis', says QNI Director Rosemary Cook CBE. 'We know that, with modern technology, many conditions can and should be looked after in the home – and for that, we need a growing, expert community nursing workforce, specially trained to work in this unique setting.'

The QNI's statement points out that while the need for care at home is growing, with the population of people aged over 65 projected to reach 12.1 million by 2017, the workforce in community nursing is becoming less, not more, well prepared. The number of qualified district nurses has fallen by 23% in a decade, 35% of district nurses are aged over 50, and fewer DNs are being trained. Meanwhile the number of health care assistants in community services more than doubled in a decade.

'Skill mix is good, and the contribution of both specialist nurses and HCAs is essential to a comprehensive service', says Ms Cook. 'But it is also essential that there are enough team leaders and senior nurses with specific expertise in nursing in the home to ensure that services are safe, and patients are properly assessed and supported. They are also essential to teach and mentor other staff moving into the community.'

She cites the current transfer of community services out of primary care trusts, and in many cases into acute or mental health trusts, as another threat to continued quality services. 'These moves seem perverse at a time when we most need a focus on excellent community services. We must not end up with a service in people's homes largely run by inexperienced and non-community trained nurses.'

Other changes the QNI is calling for include:

- Commissioners to set standards for the qualifications of team leaders in contracts for community services
- Provider organisations to publish the qualifications of community team leaders and key post holders in their patient literature
- Increased commissioning of community specialist courses
- Primary care- or public health-focused pre-registrations programmes to be available around the country, to prepare nurses who want to work in the community on qualifying.
- The Institute will be looking for new partners to work with to achieve these aims, including both statutory bodies and patient and carer organisations.

'We will also be growing and developing our Queen's Nurse community to be vocal champions of good care, skilled leaders of improvements in services, and inspiring role models to others' Ms Cook adds. 'They will form a nation-wide network that transcends different employers, qualifications and fields of practice to link like-minded community nurses together.'

Many of the priorities identified by the QNI also appear in 'Front Line Care', the report of the Prime Minister's Commission on the Future of Nursing and Midwifery.

'We are pleased to the focus on increasing the community skills of nurses, ready for their role in caring for more people outside of hospitals; and the focus on using new technologies to improve care' says Ms Cook. 'These are key issues that we raised in our '2020 Vision' report in 2009. We look forward to working with partners and colleagues to make these a reality.'

ENDS

Notes to Editors

The Queen's Nursing Institute is the charity dedicated to improving the nursing care of people in their own homes by

- influencing policies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that affect healthcare in the home and the quality of community nursing services
- developing Queen's Nurses who are committed to high standards of care in the community, helping them to make improvements in practice and to act as leaders and role models to others.

Media Contacts

Matthew Bradby
Marketing and Communications Manager
020 7549 1407 (direct)

Joanna Sagnella
Communications and Fundraising Officer
020 7549 1404