



RCN Policy Unit

Policy Statement 16/2006

Acute and Multidisciplinary Working

**The Royal College of Nursing of the
United Kingdom and the Royal College
of Physicians (London)**

September 2006

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Introduction

We are currently experiencing a period of unprecedented change both in the configuration of the services that provide health care, and in the composition and competencies of the staff that deliver them. In addition to this, the boundaries between the health care professions have become increasingly blurred, and this trend is likely to continue into the future.

The challenges facing the UK health and social care systems over the next decade include:

- the cost of health care provision
- measures to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of health and social care systems
- changes in population demography, including a decline in the birth rate and predicted rise in the numbers of older people
- changes in patterns of disease, including an increase in the prevalence of long term illnesses
- the impact of lifestyle patterns on health, for example diet, exercise and sexual activity
- public expectation and demand for quality and personalised health and social care
- inequalities in health status and health care outcomes
- reconciling demand, need, and access to health care, with safety and quality

The creativity and flexibility of health care staff are two key determinants of the unique character of our health service that have been vital and sustaining factors throughout decades of evolution and progress.

This statement from Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the Royal College of Physicians of London (RCP) sets out core principles we believe to be critical to the delivery of high quality nursing and acute medical care.

Principles

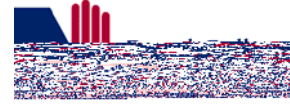
Care should:

- be focussed on the needs of the patient, their family and their carers
- ensure dignity and respect for the patient, including provision of essential nursing care
- be delivered in safe and appropriate environments where care is given at the right time, and by the most appropriate person with the right skills
- value not only the patient, but also the individual skill, competence, and experience of those delivering care

The RCN and the RCP believe that the following issues are important for the achievement of these principles.

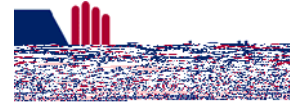
Clinical Leadership



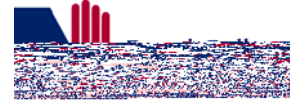


This demarcation is equally applicable to nursing – both nurses and doctors must provide leadership and inspiration for the staff groups that they encompass. A basic level of management and leadership competence is a key skill for all clinical staff to acquire. Each doctor and nurse has the potential to be an individual role model for others in many facets of their lives. The General Medical Council has also emphasised the importance of teamwork and good leadership⁵.

Good leadership means better patient care and improved working practices for NHS staff. Evaluation of the RCN Clinical Leadership Programme⁶ has found that positive leadership can make a positive difference to patient care. Many participant nurses have gained confidence and are empowered to lead their teams in spite of difficult circumstances.



service. Leadership roles should be assigned acknowledging the work that need to be undertaken, and recognising the educational background,



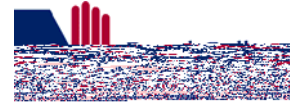
The Appropriate Use of Staff

Many different members of the clinical team provide care - teams are constantly changing in both form and function. Some team members may be transient, for example, medical trainees. Nursing staff and medical consultant staff often provide the core continuity for patients with chronic conditions. Extended and changing roles mean that the specific tasks carried out by team members will alter over time. With the continued redefining of professional boundaries, team members can learn from each other, and respect each other's contributions.

A clear identification of the needs of the patient is fundamental to determining the most appropriate mix of skills in the team delivering care. Care must only be delivered by those with the appropriate expertise, education and competencies. There is good evidence that the appropriate numbers and expertise of staff has an impact on good clinical and quality outcomes¹².

Continuity of Care

The provision of continuity of care is no longer just about continuity i



The development of nurses to provide health care fit for the future requires investment in pre- and post-registration education in order to develop the range of expertise needed. The RCN remains committed to achieving graduate level entry to the nursing profession at the point of initial registration: this is a sound foundation for the development of advanced practice.

Although nurses and doctors need education and training in their own disciplines we believe that some joint education and training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels will be beneficial to the development of shared skills and competencies and a better understanding of the contribution that each group brings to patient care. Therefore this should be encouraged wherever possible and appropriate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Physicians are committed to the promotion of collaborative working between nurses and doctors. The benefits generated by this position will be of mutual advantage to both patients and health care professionals. We make the following recommendations for Doctors and Nurses working in an acute medical setting;

- Effective team working between doctors, nurses, patients and their carers as the best method to ensure high quality patient care
- Teams must foster clear understanding of the contribution, responsibilities and accountabilities of individual team members to maximise their impact
- Teams must provide patients with identified leaders for their care
- Excellent communication is vital for effective team working and must include time set aside for doctors and nurses to discuss management of patient care, the care environment, joint care protocols and clear arrangements for timed hand over of clinical care
- Seamless continuity of care for patients recognising that the care will be delivered by many individuals and therefore continuity of information is paramount
- A clear focus on the needs of the patient in a well-managed care environment that maintains patient safety, dignity and respect.