



RCN Policy Unit

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Untapped Potential: A survey of RCN members working in mental health

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Introduction and Background

Untapped Potential: A Survey of RCN Nurses Working in Mental Health 2007 was commissioned by the RCN Policy Unit and Mental Health Nursing Forum from an independent research organisation, Employment Research Limited.

It is the first RCN survey that looks specifically at NHS mental health nurse staffing and the related issues of workload, work satisfaction and use of nursing skills.

The survey sample was drawn from across the UK from members of the RCN Mental Health Nursing and Mental Health Practice Forums, and further limited to those who indicated they were employed by the NHS. However low respondent numbers in Scotland, Wales and Northern

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utilising specialist nursing skills such as psychological therapies to maximise the impact of registered mental health nurses on patient care.

Therefore the RCN has developed a set of RCN principles for undertaking mental health nurse staffing reviews. These were originally developed for the acute general hospital ward and have been adapted for mental health settings.

Principles for Undertaking Reviews of Nurse Staffing

1. Changes to the overall numbers, competence or specialist expertise of registered nurses must be based on nurse staffing reviews.
2. Executive nurse sponsors and nurse leaders should lead staffing reviews.
3. Ward and team¹ leaders and their staff must be directly involved in all stages of the staffing review.
4. Nurse staffing must be reviewed regularly and systematically - at least biennially, and more often if patient needs or other factors change significantly. It is good practice to undertake these in partnership with nursing organisations such as the RCN.
5. Two or more recognised methods to measure and model nurse staffing levels should be used to increase the validity of the results, and linked to available data on patient, staff and organisational outcome measures wherever possible. A consistent approach to nurse staffing reviews needs to be used within organisations.
6. Protected staff time for undertaking nurse staffing reviews should be built in wherever possible.
7. Nurse staffing review findings must be communicated effectively to inform executive and board decisions about risk management and investment
8. Patient safety is paramount and there must be a recognised process in each organisation for nursing staff to record and report risks to patient care if they believe nurse staff and the7616378

10. Registered nurses must be enabled to work effectively and maximise the impact of their