Royal College of Nursing

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Gender and nursing as a profession: valuing nurses and paying them their worth

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Why we commissioned the research

- RCN research consistently shows members feel undervalued

- Pay does not match:
    - level of responsibility, autonomy, accountability
    - stress, pressure and demands
    - skills and levels of education and training
    - increasing scope of practice

- Alarm at lack of voice in responses to staffing shortages and 'failures' in care

Why we commissioned the research

- At least 40,000 vacancies in England NHS alone

- Supply and demand should influence wages

- What's so different about nursing?

Report structure

Literature review - construction of nursing

Quantitative analysis – pay and reward

Interviews with key stakeholders – how did we get here- what can be done?

Literature Review

- How is pay shaped and constrained by the impact of nursing history and status as female-dominated and defined profession?

- Through two lenses – gender and professional status

- Definitions of professions eg Witz (1990), Evetts (2003), Kelan (2008)

Professional status
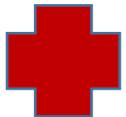
1.   Occupational boundaries/closure
   - NMC registration
   - Tensions – definition v medicine
   - New roles

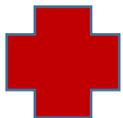2. Controlling knowledge claims
   - Nursing led research
   - Blurred lines with other fields

3. Controls over patterns of work, work processes and volume of work
   - Highly structured based on service needs

Low Wage Puzzle

- There are 40,000+ vacancies in NHS in England alone
- Why has this not translated into higher wages?
- Pay is not just a price – it is a social practice

Quantitative Study

- Analysis of LFS and ASHE data on earnings across all nursing staff, alongside other health care professions (SOC 22 includes managers, doctors, AHPs)

- Nursing pay among the lowest across all health care professionals

- Low standard deviation - little variation in earnings, so low scope for progression and higher earnings across career

- Weekly mean earnings: £526.58 SD £182.24

- AHPs: £550.95 SD £202.16

Decomposition: If women worked the same hours as men they would earn £102.60 a week more

Qualitative Study

- Confirmed outdated perceptions of nursing, in wider society and in nurses' own self-concept - this undermines professional identity

- Failure to recognise the profession as safety-critical

- Registered nursing role diluted and overwhelmed

Conclusions/recommendations

- Is nursing an attractive graduate career – do pay and conditions, working conditions, working environments and advancement opportunities match what people from work?

- Health and social care organisations need to recognise they employ a female-dominated workforce and use resources to help individuals work in the most productive way possible - at all life stages.

- Do job descriptions fully and accurately and fully measure the productive value of all aspects of nursing – emotional, productive, technical, cognitive skills?

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