

Mentors need to learn to fail nurses

NMC (Nursing and Midwifery Council) funded research has strongly criticised nurse mentors for not failing students when they show a lack of clinical competence on placements.

The report, entitled 'Failing Students', was written by Kathleen Duffy, a lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The main findings of the report are that Mentors pass student nurses' clinical assessments even when there are doubts about their performance.

Weak students who often had a history of problems in clinical practice have been given the benefit of the doubt. The report also found that Mentors are too ready to allow failing students' personal problems to influence their judgements.

The report says that mentors need to be prepared to fail students as well as to pass them. Duffy also calls for improved mentor preparation programmes and for further research into this area. She says that mentors should contact teaching staff with their concerns at an early stage and in writing.

Failure to voice concerns in writing often means that no action is taken.

The report also points out that responsibility for the problem also lies with lecturers.

Kathleen Duffy said: "The research show that Mentors find it difficult to fail students. Preparing mentors for their role and responsibility in a fail scenario is vital and must be backed up with adequate support from both education and practice."

Janice Gosby, NMC professional advisor, said: "This report provides important insights into the reasons why students are not failed in practice and gives a number of recommendations that the Council may wish to implement. Mentors are accountable for their decisions on fitness for practice that enable entry to the register, and it is the quality of these decisions that protects the public from incompetent practitioners"

The reports' recommendations are being fed into the current review of NMC Standards for the Preparation of Teachers of Nursing and Midwifery. A draft consultation paper for a new standard to support learning and assessing in practice is due to be considered by the NMC Council this June. The consultation period is scheduled for July to October.

Ends

Press Statement 30
6 May 2004

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Notes for editors:

The NMC's predecessor, the UKCC (United Kingdom Central Council) funded eight post-graduate research projects over a period of four years. The grants were given to areas that directly related to the work of the council.

This piece of research was based on a sample of 14 lecturers and 26 mentors.