

NMC back 'skill labs' to improve student nurse training

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is looking to Australia and Singapore for ways to improve the standard of nurse training in the UK.

Under proposals being considered by the regulator, trainee nurses may be allowed to gain some of their hospital practice time in 'skills labs'.

Skill labs, already accepted as part of clinical training in other countries, allow students to rehearse clinical skills before treating patients. Lab training has been shown to produce more competent students.

There is a need for a change in the way nurses are trained because of questions concerning the quality of clinical placements. This is due to increased demand for hospital placements - which results in UK nursing students having to compete with overseas nurses - and pressure on mentors.

Commenting on the proposals, Jonathan Asbridge, President of the NMC, said:

"It is clear that the current arrangements are not delivering the level of competent nurses they are meant to. Nurses have complained both to the NMC and me personally about the quality of placements they are offered. Frankly this is wholly unacceptable. Anything we can do to alleviate the shortage of placements for students and increase the level of training they receive has to be welcomed."

NMC lay Council members also gave support to the proposals but emphasised the need for better bedside manner training for nurses.

Alan Ferguson said: "Yes it's about practical skills, but it's not just a science. Nursing is an art and communication is a big part of that."

Fellow lay member, Paddy Buxton echoed that sentiment: "Complaints about nurses are usually more about attitude than clinical expertise. Students need to learn more about the patient/nurse relationship and communication skills are key."

The NMC will be conducting further research in order to set both the standards and the percentage of training that would be allowable in skill labs.

Under current EU law student nurses have to complete 2300 hours of practice time in direct contact with patients. It not yet known whether there will have to be a change in European law to allow the skills lab scheme to be implemented.

The decision by the NMC to back skills labs in the UK was prompted by a letter to the NMC in April this year from Irene Scott, Chair of the Nurses Directors Association. The Council of Deans for UK Universities that offer nursing degrees has also backed the idea.

The NMC considers this development as part of a wider review of clinical assessment of student nurses. Last month, the regulator published a report into why mentors were not failing more incompetent student nurses.

Later this year, for the first time, the NMC will have powers to investigate lack of competence and insist that failing nurses either retrain or, ultimately, leave the profession.

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Notes for Editors:

The NMC is the UK regulator for nurses, midwives and health visitors. There are around 650,000 health professionals on the register.
www.nmc-uk.org