Nurses call for post-reg specialist qualification in care of older people

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“Neglected” care home nurses are failing to receive adequate preparation for the role and are unable to access the same career development opportunities as NHS nurses, according to a survey.

Around 70% of survey respondents said undergraduate pre-registration nurse education did not prepare the future workforce with the skills, knowledge, competencies and experience to deliver high quality care to older residents.

This was despite the vast majority, 87%, of respondents – which included nurses, managers and community registrants working in care homes – reporting that a particular set of specialist competencies were required to do the job.

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Report authors

A post-registration specialist qualification for care of older people – including care home nursing – was suggested by many people taking part in the research project, which was carried out by academics at the University of York and funded by the Royal College of Nursing Foundation.
Such a qualification would ensure the nursing care home workforce was “fit for purpose” and able to meet the increasingly complex care needs of residents, said the report on the study – called Supporting Nursing in Care Homes.

“There was consensus among participants that undergraduate pre-registration nursing programmes are not adequately preparing the future nursing workforce,” noted the report.

“These programmes were viewed as focusing predominantly on acute care nursing and having insufficient focus on care for older people, frailty, comorbidities, complex long term conditions, dementia, end of life care, health and social care partnerships, and the political landscape of care homes,” it said.

Personal care – including nutrition, bowel and catheter care – was the highest ranked priority for continuing professional development of care home nurses, according to the 352 people taking part in the survey. They were followed by dementia care and managing long term conditions.

The most frequently cited barriers to CPD for care home nurses were a lack of staff cover, limited access to NHS training opportunities, and a requirement for staff to take courses in their own time and unpaid.

When asked how to ensure the nursing profession attracted the best candidates for care homes, survey respondents said nurses in this setting should receive the same learning and development opportunities offered to NHS nurses.

The report said: “Participants recommended the development of a career pathway for nurses in care homes by national bodies – such as the RCN and NHS England – care home leaders and nurse education.

“This would constitute an important step in raising the profile of the sector to attract and retain nurses, support them towards clinical leadership in the sector, as well as increase the value and visibility of the role in society,” it stated.

The report’s authors concluded: “As the populations ages, the role of the care home and the care home nurse will become increasingly important in future years and our report findings provide a platform for stakeholders in the sector – including commissioners, providers, care home managers, care home nurses, educators and researchers – to consider what needs to happen next.

“After years of neglect, it appears that the role of the care home nurse is making its way on to political, practice, education and research agendas,” they added.