THE PATIENTS ASSOCIATION

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

March 2016

HEALTH EDUCATION ENGLAND - A NEW SUPPORT ROLE FOR NURSING
'Nursing Associate': consultation questions

Q1. What are the most important issues that need to be addressed in deciding whether to establish a new care role working between a Care Assistant with a Care Certificate and a Registered Nurse?

The Patients Association asked for the views of our ambassadors, members and followers on the proposed new care role in order to inform our response. The topic was well responded to, 60% of those polled were in favour of the establishment of such a role however, 20% believed that they needed more information to allow them to make a decision.

The Patients Association believes that in the development of a new care role it must be clear how this role will improve the quality of patient care and not dilute any existing roles. New developments must be anchored in the lessons learnt from reports into problems with poor care of recent years. A new role should not be seen as a “quick fix” solution to complex staffing problems within the NHS nor be seen as a cheaper alternative to qualified registered nurses. We cannot undervalue the role of a qualified registered nurse who bring a wealth of skill and expertise to the care and wellbeing of the patients they look after. The proposed Nursing Associate role will not solve the shortage of skilled nurses across the health service and it should not aim to. The contribution to patient care that this role can achieve should concentrate on better-integrated care and addressing the current shortfalls in high-quality mental health and emergency care.

One of the most important issues is the capability and skills that are expected in the role and where the boundary lies between these roles and that of a registered nurse. Patients should be given information about the care that they can expect from different levels of carers and registered nurses.

Numerous international and UK based studies have shown an increase in the number of registered nurses in hospitals has clear benefits for patient mortality rates and other metrics related to quality patient care. The Patients Association would fully support these findings as the evidence and intelligence we receive from our national helpline on a daily basis stand testament to them.

Any development of a new role must be set in the wider context of existing roles and job titles. Care should be taken to ensure that patients are not confused by this new role and that they know who is caring for them. The central concern raised by our respondents was the need for the proposed role to be accountable, and this concern is shared by The Patients Association. They should be bound by a Code of Conduct and answerable for their practice.
Q2. What contribution to patient care do you think such a role would have across different care settings?

The Patients Association believes that developing a tangible career path for workers in the NHS is a positive step forward that recognises the valuable contribution of Health Care Assistants and allows staff to grow and develop their skills. This is important for morale and staff retention. It is vital that this new role is clearly defined to avoid patient confusion over who is providing what care and that the scope of practice is not overlapping with the role and duties of registered nurses. There needs to be a robust framework for support care workers with a discrete set of skills and knowledge to contribute to the overall healthcare workforce for this role to have a positive impact on patient experience. Ongoing training and appraisal should be embedded into the system.

Respondents spoke about the potential for nursing associates to increase the amount of patient interaction and support. This was seen as overwhelmingly positive. Patients are aware of the high workload of nurses but often feel like that they are not receiving enough face to face time with nurses. Respondents saw the proposed role as being able to make a real difference in this regard but there was a continual emphasis in the responses on the need for more nurses.

Respondents highlighted the need for those working within the proposed role to act with compassion and empathy towards patients. Nursing Associates should also have the confidence, knowledge and ability to raise concerns when a patient’s condition changes. Many respondents commented on the increased opportunity Nursing Associates could have to do this due to the amount of interaction with patients. However, some respondents raised concerns that this role could create even more distance between patients and registered nurses. The Patients Association welcomes increased contact time between healthcare professionals and patients. Selecting individuals with sound ethical values is vital.

Q3. Do you have any comments on the proposed principles of practice?

The proposed role requires an organisation-wide understanding of the role and the proposed practices in order to constitute safe and effective patient care. The role should be seen as an additional resource and not a substitute for other roles. Nursing Associates must adhere to rigorous standards with their performance assessed on an ongoing basis, patient safety should always be paramount. Respondents believed that good communication and reporting skills were essential principles of practice, with Nursing Associates needing to have the support and confidence to escalate problems. While The Patients Association believes that career development within the NHS is vital for the workforce there needs to be consideration of the possible implication on the number of Health Care Assistants as a result of the proposed creation of this new role.
Accountability of Nursing Associates was a theme returned to often by respondents and while Nursing Associates should answer for their own judgements and actions, patients and the public need to be assured that there is adequate monitoring of Nursing Associates with a structure to deal with those that do not meet the requirements of the profession. Nursing Associates must provide and promote care that puts patients first and that involves patients, their families and carers. It is essential that individuals in this role are able to recognise signs of distress in patients. This involves high levels of communication with other staff members, patients and their families. Nursing Associates must be confident to report their concerns. Patient care should always be coordinated and a Nursing Associate has a role to play in this.

Q4. Do you have any comments on the aspects of service the proposed role would cover?

The Patients Association believes that the right selection, recruitment and training is crucial to achieving the right people for the role. Respondents believed that the key skill of individuals in the role would be empathy and strong communication skills for the role to be successful it’s vital that Nursing Associates display these attributes.

The Patients Association believes that Health Education England needs to better articulate the need for this role and the aspects of service such a role would carry out. Many respondents were confused as to why this role was needed instead of more nurses and raised concerns that this was just a cheaper alternative to more nurses.

Patients need to know who is ultimately responsible for their care and there was a concern raised by respondents that individuals who were making irresponsible decisions would be able to hide behind increasing levels of staff hierarchy. Respondents were also keen to have more detail on what services the proposed role would cover.

Q5. Do you have any comments on the proposed list of knowledge this role requires?

Patients should know who is caring for them and the education and training levels which have prepared them for such a role. It’s important that patients have faith in the ability of those caring for them. Respondents were also keen to highlight that the skills such a role required transcended academic knowledge and required empathy and a caring nature. The proposed role should also have an understanding of wider issues within a hospital such as hand hygiene and the ability to challenge.

The proposed role offers an opportunity for many capable and caring people to have a career pathway and many respondents saw this as the most positive aspect of the role. The Patients Association believes that individuals in the proposed role should have significant knowledge of the needs of vulnerable groups and the elderly, as this role represents an opportunity for an increase in the care for these groups.
It is vital that Nursing Associates have a good understanding of signs of deteriorating conditions in patients and how to escalate concerns as well as the ability to report on the effectiveness of the tasks they have been asked to carry out. Nursing Associates should have good knowledge of nutrition and hydration and know how to spot any deterioration in a patient’s condition.

Q6. What do you think the title of this role should be?

60% of respondents believed that the title of the new role should not be Nursing Associates. It is important the title of the role reflects the duties of people working in the role. The title needs to enable patients and their families to understand what the person in the role is responsible for. With any new role, care needs to be taken with the title as the public are familiar with the title nurse and there is the strong possibility that the title Nursing Associate would be shortened to nurse and this would present broadly different expectations of care from the public. Patients need to know who is caring for them and that individuals are competent caring and professional in their delivery of healthcare and the title must reflect this. Many respondents made reference to the previous role of the State Enrolled Nurse as a possible title as many saw the proposed new role having much in common with this role. Other suggestions include Senior Health Assistants, Nursing Carer, Qualified Healthcare Assistant, Nursing Cadet and Care Support Nurse.

Q7. Please comment on what regulation or oversight is required for this role and which body should be responsible.

The Patients Association believes that this role must be regulated. The majority of respondents wanted the Nursing and Midwifery Council to regulate the role. However if the NMC was to regulate this role there needs to be significant consideration of the possible implications of increased work for the NMC. If the NMC was to regulate this role it must not detract from its ability as a current regulator. The cost of regulation is the cost of protecting patients and this must be factored into these plans as we must ensure safeguards for patients.

Respondents also raised concern about the potential implications of increased supervision required by nurses who already carry out a significant amount of supervision. Respondents were adamant that nurses should not be subjected to increased bureaucracy as a result of this role, concerns were also raised that an increased layer around nursing could cause confusion and lack of care.

The consultation would welcome any further views.

Many of the respondents to our survey were confused as to why the creation of a new role was needed. There was real concern about the number of registered nurses. The Patients Association believes that the impact of removing bursaries for nursing students should be evaluated fully before any creation of a new role. For this role to have a positive impact on
patients it is crucial that there is clarity of scope for these individuals. If the scope is too wide they may pose a risk to patients and if it’s too limited they may be of little practical use. The Patients Association remains deeply concerned with shortage of trained registered nurse and we urgently need more investment to train more registered nurses so we can be confident that the care provided to patients is both of high quality and safe.