

Press release

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For immediate release

The state of occupational health nursing in the UK: part 2

Current Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) guiding principles for training occupational health (OH) nurses do not adequately prepare OH nurses for practice, and do not meet the needs of the OH nurse workforce, a survey of UK OH nurses has found. Half of the OH nurses surveyed described the content of their OH nursing courses as inadequate, with only one quarter describing the content as adequate.

Additionally, most OH nurses said that learning alongside other public health nurses – such as health visitors and school nurses as part of the NMC’s specialist community public health nurse (SCPHN) registration category – was not an ideal environment for preparing OH nurses for future practice.

The vast majority (81%) of OH nurses said that a protected title, such as ‘Registered OHN’ should be used for those who have completed an approved education programme.

The second part of the national survey of OH nurses is [published in the journal *Occupational Health \[at Work\]*](#) and focuses on education, funding and regulation. The online survey was carried out in April/May 2016, and attracted 1,429 responses from UK nurses.

The survey was set up to analyse the state of OH nursing in the UK and to assess the need, feasibility and appetite for a new professional body – a Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing (FOHN) – to better represent OH nurse practitioners. The survey was run jointly by the FOHN Development Group and the independent OH research and publishing group The At Work Partnership.

The report also reveals:

- The NMC’s ‘guiding principles’ state that SCPHN courses should include a balance of 50% theory and 50% practice – but to be successful this requires sufficient numbers of OH practice teachers and work placements
- Just one in eight respondents was a practice teacher – not being on the SCPHN register, lack of funding, or insufficient support from the employer were the chief reasons reported for not being a practice teacher
- Less than three in 10 practitioners said that work placements for OH students were available at their place of work, with scarce resources or that OH was outsourced by the employer among the reasons given for their lack of availability
- Just over half of respondents had completed a SCPHN course but many OH nurses take non-SCPHN courses or practice without any specific OH qualification
- Just under half (49%) of respondents said that being on the SCPHN part of the NMC register was not a requirement for their current job – there is in fact no legal requirement to be on the SCPHN part of the NMC register to practise OH.

- A significant minority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction that while they held university master's or diploma qualifications in OH, these were not recognised by the NMC for SCPHN registration
- Four in 10 respondents believed that graduate OH nurses lacked the knowledge to fully undertake core OH nursing tasks, while 40% were concerned about the ability of graduate OH nurses to work autonomously
- The vast majority of respondents agreed that OH nursing education would be best served by identifying and funding a limited number of Higher Education Institution centres of excellence to ensure a critical mass of OH student numbers and high-quality learning
- Most respondents agreed that multi-professional learning, alongside other OH professionals, should form the basis of OH nursing courses
- A future FOHN could conceivably work alongside the National School of Occupational Health in promoting the development of OH-specific courses that meet the OH needs of employers and the workforce

Responding to part two of the survey report, FOHN Development Group chair Jo Berriman said: 'The findings will inform our discussions with the regulator about priorities for OH nurse education and is timely given the recent publication of the Public Health England blueprint for occupational health nurse education and the government's green paper on health, wellbeing and disability.'

'Ensuring the quality and consistency of OH nurse education must be at the heart of what we do to deliver effective clinical practice and to safeguard the public. As a profession, we need to better influence key stakeholder's thinking in relation to OH nursing – what it is and what it can achieve.'

'The combined findings from our survey give us an exciting opportunity to do this. The Faculty Development Group will champion this agenda in 2017 at the same time as continuing to build the organisation that will soon become our Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing'.

Dr John Ballard of the At Work Partnership and a co-author of the report said: 'The system for OH nurse education in the UK is inconsistent for students and confusing for employers. Both need to be sure that the courses meet the needs of modern OH practice so that newly qualified OH nurses can hit the ground running, without needing additional skills training before they can carry out their professional duties.'

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Notes for editors

The research is published in the Feb/Mar 2017 edition of the journal *Occupational Health [at Work]*. The journal is published by The At Work Partnership, London, an independent occupational health publishing, research and training organisation. atworkpartnership.co.uk/occupationalhealthatwork.

Suggested citation: Coomer K, Ballard J. *The state of OH nursing. Part two: OH nurse education, funding and regulation. Occupational Health [at Work] 2017; 13(5): 19–26.*

The online survey was conducted in April/May 2016. A total of 1,429 OH nurses responded.

The FOHN Development Group was set up in 2015 to explore the feasibility of developing a national professional body for OH nurses. It published a position paper in November 2015 on occupational health nurse education, funding and regulation: fohn.org.uk/data/files/faculty-of-occupational-health-nursing-positionpaper-final.pdf

Occupational Health [at Work] is published by The At Work Partnership, an independent publisher, research and training organisation, specialising in occupational health and disability at work.