

Marlyn Glen

Nurses, Who's looking after them?

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This week , a figure intruded into the world of Scottish Government spin.

The type of figure that no photocal by Government Ministers could ever distract from

An example of sound evidence winning against soundbites .

That figure was the one showing that the number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside is now lower than it was when Alex Salmond's Scottish Government took power in 2007.

The number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside is now 4,974 full-time equivalents.

In 2007 , at the time of the annual staffing census, the number was 4,995.

That's 21 more nurses than there are today.

All across Scotland, similar figures are standing up for the NHS against the Scottish Government.

This is the second year in succession that the number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside has fallen as a result of the imposition by the Scottish Government on the health board of "efficiency savings", a softer-sounding version of the word "cuts".

As a result, last year, across the entire range of front-line health services in the health board, 190 posts were lost.

The consequence of cuts of this severity will damage the quality of patient care as rising demand continues, with nursing staff, fewer in number, being overstretched.

Last year, the Scottish Parliament's Health Committee report on health boards' budgets made clear its concern about the effect of planned reductions in staff on the quality of service in the NHS through "vacancy management", by pointing out the problems created by the filling of vacant posts by existing staff and how the quality of service would be affected.

It highlighted that the remaining staff "may be left to cope, with implications in terms of increased stress and sickness absence, damaging the quality of service.'

RCN Scotland work in unflagging pursuit of what's best for their members, and 5 months ago they unveiled another stark side of the upshot of hundreds of the "efficiency savings" that the NHS was commanded to find.

Their members' survey indicated :

Only 10 per cent regarded staffing where they worked as satisfactory

Over 95 per cent stated working beyond the hours of their contract, and over 25 per cent of them stating that this occurred on every shift.

Almost 30 per cent said they missed meal times at work three times each week

Over 15 per cent said that they rarely or never took entitled breaks.

Around 20 per cent displayed "presenteeism" in the past 6 months - being unwell but still at work.

It's small wonder then that RCN Scotland are campaigning for the recommendations of the Boorman Review to be implemented by all health boards in Scotland.

Boorman's study of the NHS in England recognised that a healthier NHS staff would lead to improvements in patient care and, at the same time, save significant sums of money.

His work claims that the number days lost by illness absence alone could be reduced by one third, resulting in an additional 3 million working days per year, and annual savings of over £500 million to the NHS.

The Review can be downloaded here. (link to be made here by JH)

Among its recommendations are :

service-wide culture transformation to promote better understanding health and well-being issues from board to ward level

an improved provision of wellness and early intervention services for staff

a national minimum standard of occupational health

Teamwork is at the heart of working in the NHS, as it should be for all other organisations and individuals working with the NHS.

We, as a society, should take better care of those who, one day, will take care of us.

In this financial year, the NHS in Scotland has been ordered to find record "efficiency savings" of £350 million.

Link

Marlyn Glen's website <http://www.marlynglen.org.uk>