



Martin Bradley  
Chief Nursing Office,  
Northern Ireland

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety,  
Castle Buildings,  
Stormont,  
Belfast,  
BT4 3SJ

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010

Dear Mr Bradley,

Unite /Mental Health Nurses Association have made a submission to '*Delivering Excellence: Achieving Recovery*' on the future of mental health nursing.

We are writing to specifically raise concerns relating to the future role of nurses in the closure of large psychiatric hospitals and the development of supported housing schemes. Unite/MHNA welcome the move for those last remaining patients from large, often Victorian institutions to smaller facilities within the community.

The first planned closure, by South Eastern Trust, of the long stay wards at Downshire Hospital will result in a transfer to supported housing through a Housing Association. Nursing staff will transfer with these patients but will become "support workers". Their Terms and Conditions will transfer, as will all the knowledge and skills which are credited in '*Delivering Excellence: Achieving Recovery*'.

Certain duties will be removed including administration of oral and intramuscular medications. Community Psychiatric Nurses will call to administer depot Injections, though there are qualified nurses on the premises, who have been giving these same patients their injections for many years. This patient group is the final residual group with the most chronic illnesses, behavioural problems who have received high quality nursing care, in very poor environments, for most of their lives.



Throughout the past 30 years patients have moved to hostels and recently supported housing schemes, cared for by a mix of skilled staff, but this is the most demanding group and signal closure of large hospitals. Should the South Eastern Trust progress this proposal it will be a template for other Trusts to follow, to the detriment of the profession of mental health nursing.

This Trust decision to develop supported housing will enable financial income from housing and social security benefits. Designating the facility as requiring “nursing care” would negate this financial opportunity. The Trust is restricted by legislative requirement under Regulations.

*‘Delivering Excellence: Achieving Recovery’* aspires to new and innovative roles for mental health nurses. Regrettably, they will be excluded from providing mental health nursing care to those in community facilities. Future qualified nurses will be employed to work in these facilities, but will not be nurses, and will not be paid at Band 5. Support Workers, in the future, are likely to come from other non-professional backgrounds.

Northern Ireland is unique in the United Kingdom with combined Health and Social Care Trusts. Bamford has outlined new and innovative ways of working, which gives potential for development of mental health nursing, except in the care of this patient group.

Unite/MHNA petition you to:

1. Discuss this issue with Trust Directors of Nursing
2. Investigate with RQIA, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and other appropriate groups new ways of designating community mental health facilities to recognise mental health nursing skills and care which would allow housing and other benefits to be obtained.
3. Raise this concern with the Commissioner of services who are seeking Trusts to provide this form of environment.

Mental health nursing may look to develop into specialist areas; cognitive behavioural therapy; assessment; forensics; addictions; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; etc, but their unique skills must be available for those most vulnerable individuals with chronic mental health in the transition and continuing to live in the community.

Unite/MHNA request you use your Office to maintain the position, knowledge , skills and name of mental health nursing in this area of expertise. I am willing to meet with you or your representatives to discuss this important issue.

Regards,

David Keating  
 Unite/MHNA National Professional Committee (Northern Ireland)  
 C/o: Shimna House, Downshire Hospital, Downpatrick. BT30 7LA