

# WHEN THE PRESSURE IS PILING UP

Work demands can take their toll on nurse managers, so how can they deal with the stress? Ben Jones reports

**Few jobs in nursing and health care are as stressful as those of nurse managers.**

The detrimental effects of stress are obvious: sickness absence or, worse still, attrition from the nursing profession altogether.

In the 2012 NHS staff survey, more than a third of general managers (37 per cent), including nurse managers, said they had felt unwell over the previous 12 months as a result of work-related stress.

So what are the major stressors, why do they exist and what can be done to counter them (see box)?

One clinical nurse manager has a clear opinion. Jane Brookes, a senior sister on a paediatric ward at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, says patient care comes above all else. 'The biggest stress is ensuring that the highest possible standard of care happens,'



*Stress buster: Jane Brookes recommends being calm and adaptable*

she says. 'We must also meet many targets and carry out several audits, so that is what we are thinking about much of the time.'

Jill Byrne, Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust director of nursing and patient safety, suggests that responsibility for patient care, as well as operational aspects such as meeting targets and corporate responsibilities, can take their toll on nurse managers.

Responding to emails alone can demand large amounts of time.

'Nurse managers can receive between 150 and 200 emails a day. I get responses to emails at one in the morning; in fact, I recently received an email from a colleague at 4.30am,' Ms Byrne explains.

## Work/life balance

The sheer number of hours worked by nurse managers makes it difficult to find a work/life balance. 'The challenge is to care enough for your partner and your children,' says Ms Byrne.

She advocates working smarter, not harder. For example, from this month all her trust's ward managers will have a supervisory role, which means that they will not provide clinical care. Instead, they will have more time to manage their ward. By comparison, Ms Byrne offers the analogy of the supermarket store manager who would not manage the store while operating the checkout.

Ms Brookes, meanwhile, suggests that nurse managers could delegate some administrative work to personal assistants.

But what is the solution to coping with the inevitable stressors? 'The key is to be adaptable and remain calm,' says Ms Brookes.

Nurse managers who feel the effects of stress are urged not to

## Common managerial stressors

- ▶ Balancing competing responsibilities.
- ▶ Managing budgets.
- ▶ Devising ways to care for an ageing population.
- ▶ Dealing with constant pressure on staff numbers.
- ▶ Working with perpetual NHS restructuring.

## NOTICE BOARD

### FUTURE OF HEALTH

**Conference** NHS England, University College London and the national commissioning board will hold a conference to discuss how organisations can shape a new way of working across health and social care at the Business Design Centre on October 3/4. Through breaking down established practices, the conference will argue for a more long-term approach to managing long-term conditions. Speakers include National Voices chief executive Jeremy Taylor, NHS England medical director Sir Bruce Keogh, and comedian and mental health campaigner Ruby Wax. [www.futureofhealth.co.uk](http://www.futureofhealth.co.uk)

**Record-keeping** Healthcare Events will hold a legal masterclass on medical documentation and record-keeping

on October 9 at the Hallam Conference Centre, central London. The one-day course will provide a guide to good record-keeping principles and introduce an audit tool to help teams to monitor standards. The day also covers the importance of patient records, how they might be used in a legal context, the production of witness statements and guidance for managers to help staff produce unfamiliar documents. [tinyurl.com/Recordsdocumentation](http://tinyurl.com/Recordsdocumentation)

**Adult safeguarding** The government has updated its guidance on adult safeguarding. Good practice principles are critical in ensuring that individuals are treated with dignity and respect when they are involved in safeguarding enquiries. [tinyurl.com/Govpolicysafeguarding](http://tinyurl.com/Govpolicysafeguarding)

## RESOURCES

## RCN nurses in management and leadership forum

tinyurl.com/NMLRCN  
or telephone 0345 772 6100

## Nursing Management journal

rcnpublishing.com/journal/nm

suffer in silence. Jane Valle, chair of the RCN's nurses in management and leadership forum, which acts as a sounding-board and mouthpiece for nurse managers suffering from stress, says those who are under pressure should talk about how they are feeling and delegate work if possible.

'Stress needs to be tackled on several levels, but the most important thing is to speak out about it,' says Ms Valle. 'Sometimes this can be really difficult, so that is the time to get support, whether it is from the RCN or another union. Nurses are not good at taking time for activities such as supervision, but that can make a huge difference.'

The RCN has other resources to help those experiencing stress, for example RCN Direct where members can get support and advice seven days a week. Counselling is also available.

In addition, the RCN offers educational events for nurse managers, which offer opportunities for networking and problem-sharing among peers **NS**

Ben Jones is a freelance journalist

## Avoiding fatigue is vital for safe care, says Nicola Davies

## Health and safety matters

**You covered a colleague's shifts last weekend and worked your regular shifts this week and have not been at home for 36 consecutive hours for 12 days. As you update a patient's medication chart, you realise that you just recorded administering 10cc of morphine instead of 4cc. You have made a terrible mistake.**

Medication errors are increasingly common and are due mainly to nurses working long shifts and battling fatigue.

How can nurses maintain high safety standards in the face of pressures that seem to be integral to nursing?

► **Advocate for risk management** Who monitors nurse rosters to ensure that nurses have adequate recovery time between shifts? Is there a maximum number of night shifts, a minimum number of days off and/or minimum hours between shifts? If not, nurses should work with their manager to implement such policies.

► **Know the facts** Recent studies demonstrate that tired nurses are three times more likely to make mistakes. Research also shows that being awake for 17-20 hours is similar to having a blood alcohol content of up to

## RESOURCES

## NHS Choices' tips to fight fatigue

tinyurl.com/Avoidfatigue

## Avoiding workplace fatigue

tinyurl.com/Managefatigue

## Tips for working well

- Establish a healthy sleep schedule and stick to it.
- Understand the times when you are most alert and schedule your work accordingly whenever possible.
- Protect your energy by eating well and exercising regularly.
- Do not accept extra shifts if this compromises your sleep.



0.10mg/100ml above the legal driving limit. Fatigue makes it difficult to remember things and slows reactions.

► **Protect patient safety** Nurses have a responsibility to manage their own fatigue. They need to be able to recognise the signs and talk to their manager if they are worried.

Nurses can help change the culture that encourages them to work long shifts without rest by becoming active in organisations that promote healthy working practices and having contact with their union. Only recently has nurse fatigue become an issue. In the meantime, nurses can work to ensure that patient safety is their priority **NS**

Nicola Davies is a writer and health psychologist



**Nurse Awards** The Nursing Standard Nurse Awards 2014 open for applications on September 30. Entries can be made in a number of clinical categories and nominations may be made by colleagues, patients and nurses. Judging takes place in February and the awards ceremony will be held in May. Meanwhile, 2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the Nurse Awards and Nursing Standard is trying to make contact with all the previous winners. Get in touch via [www.nurseawards.co.uk](http://www.nurseawards.co.uk) (goes live on Sept 30).

**Learning disability** A conference jointly run by A2A network, Mencap, the RCN, the Learning Disabilities Public Health Observatory and the Department of Health on getting hospital care right for people with learning disabilities will be held on

October 15 at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. There will be a keynote presentation on the findings from the confidential inquiry into deaths of people with learning disabilities. The day is free of charge and is specifically aimed at acute and ambulance NHS staff. [tinyurl.com/NLDconf](http://tinyurl.com/NLDconf)

**Masterclasses** In conjunction with the Department of Health, the RCN is running three masterclasses to update school nurses and community children's nurses on national policies. A series of new e-learning resources will be launched at the events to be held at The Met Hotel Leeds on September 30, the Plough & Harrow Hotel, Birmingham on October 23, and RCN HQ at 20 Cavendish Square, London on October 29. For details go to the following three websites: [tinyurl.com/MC-Leeds](http://tinyurl.com/MC-Leeds), [tinyurl.com/MC-Birmingham](http://tinyurl.com/MC-Birmingham) and [tinyurl.com/MC-London](http://tinyurl.com/MC-London)