

Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act comes in to full force

The Act places a duty on health boards and NHS Trusts to take steps to calculate and maintain nurse staffing levels in adult acute medical and surgical inpatient wards, as well as a broader duty to consider how many nurses are necessary to provide care for patients sensitively in all settings.

It also ensures that the NHS more widely recognises the professional judgement of nurses in identifying the needs of their patients, and supports nurses from ward to board to have the necessary and sometimes difficult conversations about the resource needs of their patients based on those needs.

Kirsty Williams AM introduced what would become the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act as a Private Member's Bill in December 2014. With the support of Welsh Government, the Act received Royal Assent on 21 March 2016.

Guidance to support NHS staff to implement the legislation was developed through consultations with nurses, patients, staff and stakeholder groups.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Implementing the Nurse Staffing Levels legislation is a real step forward for Wales, and we have done so because we understand there's an evidence base that shows high quality nursing care with the right numbers and skill mix makes a real difference to patient care and patient outcomes.

“We now have a system to empower and support nurses on the front line, and nurse leaders to use their professional judgement to understand and plan for the right levels of care; with the right number of nurses needed to ensure the patient gets the very best deal possible.”

Chief Nursing Officer for Wales, Jean White said:

“I'm really delighted that Wales has taken the lead in introducing this piece of legislation. It is a wonderful opportunity for us to get the right nurse staffing levels to meet our patients' needs and to empower our nurses with the evidence base that will support and help inform their professional judgement.

There is a real sense of pride in Wales within our nursing community and we regularly read about how the Welsh public share that sentiment, in letters praising the outstanding care they have

received at the hands of our nursing staff. We want to see the implementation of this Act cement that feeling of pride and see it spread to every corner of our workforce and be a clear message to the outside world that in Wales, we value our nurses.”

Tina Donnelly, Director of the Royal College of Nursing in Wales, said:

“This is a fantastic achievement, which will focus on ensuring patients will benefit from legislation that will protect them and ensure a safe environment of care. Low nurse staffing levels are directly linked to sharp rises in patient mortality. This new law means an appropriate number of nurses will be at the bedside providing patient care. RCN Wales has been proud to work with Kirsty Williams AM and the Welsh Government in seeking to achieve this legislation which we confirm was a first for the UK and Europe.”