The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the UK’s largest professional association and union for nurses with around 390,000 members, of which over 37,500 are in Scotland. Nurses and health care support workers make up the majority of those working in health services and their contribution is vital to delivery of the Scottish Government’s health policy objectives.

RCN Scotland welcomes the Health and Sport Committee’s inquiry into child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Nurses are the largest professional group working with children and young people with mental health problems and their families, and we therefore value the opportunity to comment on ways to better meet the needs of this group. We have also attached the following documents that address many of the issues raised by the inquiry in more detail:

- *Children and young people’s mental health – every nurse’s business* (Royal College of Nursing, 2004).
- *Lost in transition: Moving young people between child and adult health services* (Royal College of Nursing, 2007).

**Identification and Prevention of Mental Health Problems in Children and Adolescents**

Nurses have a key role in the identification and prevention of mental health problems in childhood and adolescence. They are in the right place to promote the psychological and emotional well being of children, young people, and families and to prevent the development of mental health problems by being aware of the factors that can put children and young people at risk.

However, capacity within the CAMH workforce, and capability within the broader health workforce is of particular concern. Resources are often pressurised, with an increasing number of referrals being made to CAMH services. Within current capacity, we are concerned that children and young people with identified mental health needs are unable to access the skilled support they need. In addition, the capability issues could mean that children and young people are not identified as being in need of specialised support.

The Government’s recently released *Early Years Framework* signalled that the new direction for prevention and early intervention will need to be taken forward by realigning and prioritising resources, rather than through new funding. Consequently, RCN Scotland believes that identification and prevention of mental health problems in the early years, through childhood, and adolescence will require strategies that complement and support CAMH services through development of appropriate knowledge and skills of nurses working in universal services. For example:

- Increasing awareness amongst the wider nursing workforce of the impact of maternal mental health on children during early years,
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particularly in terms of attachment, and developing skills in identifying and responding to maternal mental health risks.

- Increasing the capacity of nurses working in schools with the underpinning knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide advice and support, as well as facilitate early identification and intervention, thereby reducing the need to refer to specialist CAMH services. The Health and Wellbeing in School pilots should be used as an opportunity to explore this in communities with higher proportions of vulnerable children and young people.

- Developing further awareness of child and adolescent mental health issues amongst all staff at the points of interface between primary, secondary, and tertiary health. Increased shared learning at both undergraduate and post-graduate education would assist with demystifying issues around mental health and increasing awareness and understanding of mental health problems.

- Building awareness of child and adolescent mental health issues across the education, social care and the third sector. The Early Years Framework provides an opportunity for more integrated approaches to be taken across sectors that could result in roles, responsibilities and referral pathways for early intervention and support. However, this is dependent on an appreciation that infant, child, and adolescent mental health issues are not just ‘health’ issues, and that responsibilities for prevention and early intervention must be shared.

Access to Services and Ongoing Support

Access to mental health services is particularly important in adolescence. When children and young people are facing difficulties they need support rapidly, not later when services become available. However, again, capacity within CAMH services is currently a barrier to better access. This is likely to become more apparent as NHS Boards seek to meet the new access target for CAMH services.

Workforce planning, incorporating strategies to grow the capacity and expertise of health professionals providing CAMH services, is vital. Improved education and training opportunities are a crucial part of this. In terms of nursing, the medium to long-term approaches are needed to:

- Influence the content of pre-registration nursing education across all branches to contain appropriate content on child and adolescent mental health issues.
- Enhance post-registration education and training opportunities specific to child and adolescent mental health, so that nurses are adequately prepared and supported to work effectively and confidently with children and young people with mental health problems, and their
families. These opportunities need to be accessible to nurses across Scotland.

- Facilitation of clearer career pathways for nurses with an interest in this area.

**Transition from CAMHS to Adult Mental Health Services**

RCN members have identified the following issues as most affecting the transition of young people to adult services:

- Lack of adult services, and appropriate facilities for young adults
- Organisational cultures, fragmentation of services, and competing priorities
- Lack of appropriate staff, including adult specialists
- Varying referral criteria, ages/timescales for transition
- Different ages/timescales for transition
- Little or poor preparation for the young person and parents/carers
- Resourcing, including funding arrangements for services such as respite care

The following improvements are suggested to address these issues:

- Development of shared protocols between children’s and adults’ services that are genuinely shared arrangements, and are properly implemented. These arrangements should be accessible and known to children, young people, and their families, and should apply across boundaries and disciplines.
- Designation of staff within specialities to handle transitions, or employment of advocates/transition facilitators/youth workers to support transition.
- Improved information and preparation for young people and families about transition. This includes meeting health care staff that will be caring for the young person in the adult service, and allowing preparatory visits where possible - particularly if the adult service is based in, or close to, acute adult settings.
- Training and education for staff in both child and adolescent, and adult services about transitions.

Finally, the RCN believes that services need to be flexible and based on the needs of children and young people, rather than the needs of services. It is important that NHS Boards and social service providers engage with young people in the development of new services, protocols, or practices relating to transition. Likewise, third sector organisations should not be overlooked in planning transitions from CAMHS to adult mental health services as these can provide useful avenues of support.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.
Theresa Fyfe
Director
Consultation on a Patients’ Rights Bill for users of the NHS in Scotland

Please complete the details below and return it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

Name: Royal College of Nursing Scotland
Postal Address: 42 South Oswald Road, Edinburgh, EH9 2HH

1. Are you responding: (please tick one box):
(a) as an individual (go to Q2a/b and then Q4)
(b) on behalf of a group/organisation (go to Q3 and then Q4)

2a. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government website)?
Yes ☐ (go to 2b below)
No, not at all ☐ we will treat your response as confidential

2b. Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your response available to the public on the following basis (please tick one of the following boxes):
Yes, make my response, name and address all available ☐
Yes, make my response available, but not my name or address ☐
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ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS
3. The name and address of your organisation will be made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government website). Are you also content for your response to be made available?
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SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT
4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Government to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?
Yes ☑
No ☐