

Scheme for graduate students

Newcastle Health Authority and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic have co-operated to enable three postgraduate nurses to take higher degrees on a part-time salaried basis.

ANTHONY CARR and MICHAEL CLINTON outline the project.

FOR SOME time senior nurses in Newcastle have explored the possibility of developing a scheme to help graduate nurses obtain higher degrees by part-time study, continue nursing employment and be supported financially. In close co-operation with the school of behavioural science at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, the Newcastle Health Authority has now reached a stage where three studentships are about to be offered.

In addition to salary being paid to students, leave of absence with pay will be planned so that attendance at the polytechnic can be arranged. Claims for course tuition and examination fees will be allowed, including any mandatory registration fees and an allowance of 50 per cent of the cost of textbooks up to a maximum grant of £40 per annum. Also included is the cost of any production of papers which is a course requirement and excess travelling expenses at public transport rate.

Package

The scheme is part of a package of study programmes developed by the polytechnic and health authorities in the Northern Region. Other study programmes include a foundation certificate in higher education, the diploma in social research methods, the proposed Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) diploma in professional studies in nursing, and the BSc (Hons) health studies (applied behavioural science) degree course.

Three students are to be admitted to this new programme. The scheme is intended for graduates in nursing or nurses with a first degree in either the social or biological sciences.

The scheme is in two main parts. For the first 12 months the successful candidates will be employed in ward or community settings, depending on their

qualifications and experience. This placement will be closely related to the area of research in which the candidate is interested. Attendance at the polytechnic will be one day a week. Help will be given to enable the student to develop research proposals for consideration by the polytechnic's research degrees committee, which is empowered by the CNAA to register candidates for higher degrees. We believe that this committee is at present unique at polytechnic level in being allowed to register students for the degree of PhD without reference to the council.

Acceptance of the research proposal by this committee will enable the health authority to issue a new contract of employment which may specifically detail the work the student will have to carry out. For instance, the research degrees committee may require the student to include a taught part in their programme of study by attending the statistics component of the diploma in social research methods course. The nurse will still spend time in a clinical setting, but time for study and supervision by appointed supervisors will be carefully planned.

Much of the applied research will be undertaken in the student's own working environment. This is why the area of research must be closely integrated with the needs of patients and the priorities of nursing services.

The minimum period of part-time study for a master of philosophy degree is 33 months and for a doctor of philosophy it is 45 months. The polytechnic research degrees committee has discretion to backdate its approval of a candidate for a period of up to three months.

On completion of the scheme the successful student may be encouraged to apply for specially created positions in a hospital or community unit. This would enable them to practise their skills as a clinical nurse researcher and take on the supervision of other graduate nurses in the scheme. The authority hopes that in a 10-year period a research-based ward or community centre would be created in each of its six units of management run by qualified nurse researchers.

The department of continuing education and nursing research is about to be expanded under the direction of a newly established post of assistant director of nursing education at the Newcastle General Hospital.

The nursing research steering committee for the nursing research studentship scheme, chaired by the chief nursing officer, is composed of the director of nursing education, three directors of nursing, the assistant director of nursing education, the region's nursing research liaison officer, three members of the academic staff of the polytechnic, including the head of the school of behavioural science and a nurse principal lecturer who is to be the scheme's co-ordinator. The district training officer will also be a member of the committee.

Information

Considerable information will be sent to each interested applicant, including part of the research findings of Bond and Bond on topics ranked by nurses, midwives and health visitors as nursing research priorities in the region. Prospective students will also be encouraged to think very carefully before embarking on this venture.

With the changes in nursing education about to occur at both basic and postbasic level, it is essential for qualified nurses to begin to think of nursing as a research-based profession. This thinking has to be encouraged at a high level first if the necessary support is to be provided by directors of nursing services and their staff.

Any director of nursing services who has a potential research student in her area will be appointed to the steering committee and help in the selection of students. It will be the duty of directors of nursing services to meet regularly with students and support them.

Finally, the academic nursing staff from the school of behavioural science will be awarded honorary nursing contracts at the appropriate level by the health authority, so that they may play a full role in the supervision of students, both within the health authority and the polytechnic □

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