

Royal College of Nursing

an international perspective

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) represents nurses across the United Kingdom, but it also works to encourage nurses to work internationally, especially in countries with struggling health systems and health worker shortages. As well as providing training and facilitating nurses to work abroad, RCN has launched a virtual humanitarian community, and supports Global Healthcare Information Network's 'Healthcare Information for All' campaign. Dr Peter Carter, Director of the Royal College of Nursing tells more.

I've always believed that nursing is a profession like no other; one where no matter where in the world you are, the aim of the nurse is always the same - to care, support and treat. It's a profession in which technical expertise and medical knowledge is effortlessly balanced with compassion and empathy.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is proud to represent nurses and nursing up and down the UK and with 400,000 members, we are the largest nursing union in the world. However, our work isn't just confined to the UK; we are an international voice for nursing and are determined to promote and protect our profession across the globe.

As you'll know by now, this issue of Health Exchange focuses on human resources and the importance of getting feet on the ground in some of the world's developing nations.

What you may not be aware of is the work that the RCN is doing on the international stage to encourage nurses to consider working overseas and especially in countries with less wealth and fewer resources than our own.

In September 2009, the RCN hosted a joint event with the Royal College of Midwives, the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Médecins Sans Frontières. Entitled

'Working overseas: changing lives - are you ready for the challenge?' The event sought to promote the idea of working as a nurse in some of the poorest nations on earth. Delegates heard the personal experiences of nurses and midwives who had decided to work abroad and from senior members of all the organisations running the event.

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On the same day we launched something quite revolutionary - a virtual international humanitarian community. The entire project was spearheaded by the RCN's International Department working in partnership with members, who had undertaken humanitarian work in developing countries.

These members told us that they would value the opportunity to link up and network with like-minded nurses who had done similar work. With this in mind we launched an online community for members interested in humanitarian aid work and healthcare projects in developing countries to communicate and network with one another.

The world is seemingly becoming smaller and smaller and in part that is due to the incredible popularity of online methods of communication. It was obvious to us that in order to bring people together and promote the work that can be done overseas, we had to use this new technology.

Away from the online world, the RCN has worked hard to improve learning and development opportunities for nurses wishing to work abroad.

The RCN has accredited one of VSO's residential pre-departure 'Skills for working in development' training courses. This course is for nurses who have been selected to volunteer with VSO and provides them with transferable skills, tools and techniques for effective development work.

It includes areas such as managing participatory change, facilitation and leadership skills and working within challenging environments.

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It is not just more health professionals on the ground that the developing world sorely needs, it is also the dissemination of vital healthcare information. As the



Paul Boggust, paediatric nurse and health visitor, undertaking short-term voluntary work with the Roma Community as part of the Drita e Botes Medical Outreach Programme in Shkoze, Albania Photo: Marilyn Boggust

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Global Healthcare Information Network (GHIN) puts it; 'More than 20,000 people died yesterday from common childhood illnesses, malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and complications of childbirth.' The same number will die today and tomorrow if real action is not taken now. Thousands would still be alive if they had been attended to by an informed healthcare provider who had access to basic information.

The RCN supports GHIN and in particular their 'Healthcare Information for all' (HIFA2015) campaign which, as the name suggests, wants every person worldwide to have access to an informed healthcare provider. Their target is to have this in place by 2015. The campaign rightly focuses on the importance of nurses in developing countries and of improving the quality of information available to them.

In relation to nursing, the campaign has a very clear goal: 'By 2015, every nurse and midwife will have access to the information they need to learn, to diagnose, to provide appropriate care and treatment, and to save lives.' Good quality, up to date, relevant evidence is essential for improving patient care and that is why the RCN is giving its full support to this important campaign.

Clearly there are numerous international challenges in front of us; but there are also plenty of opportunities. The RCN's international team can help nurses in the UK planning to work abroad, or those abroad planning to work in the UK. For more information on what they can do for you, visit www.rcn.org.uk/nursing

Healthcare Information for All
www.hifa2015.org

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