

Exclusive: Nurses demand more purchase power over products

18 March, 2015 | By Steve Ford



Nurses could both improve patient care and save the NHS money if they were handed more control over the purchasing of everyday ward equipment, according to new survey findings.

The joint survey of over 850 nurses by *Nursing Times*, NHS Supply Chain and the Royal College of Nursing will inform a major new campaign to boost the influence of nursing staff in the NHS procurement process.

A resounding 90% of survey respondents thought senior nurses should have greater influence over what products were used to support patient care.

A similar percentage said they believed nurses could save money if they had greater involvement in the purchasing process and 87% thought patient safety would be improved through close working between nursing staff and clinical supplies teams.

More than half, 55%, said they had already seen areas where savings could be made by changing the clinical products they used, for example through standardisation or reducing waste.

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Survey respondent

Just under a third branded current purchasing at their organisation as either fairly or very “ineffective”, while around half thought there was at least some scope for making savings through more cost-effective procurement of things like gloves and syringes.

A general theme from respondents was that purchasing better quality products was more cost-effective in the long-term than supply teams always opting for the least expensive alternative.

Others noted that “brand loyalty” and historical use of the same product by trusts could be a challenge to getting better alternatives onto the ward or accessible to nursing teams.

“Using the cheapest product is not always value for money as you can end up using twice as much as one that is slightly more expensive,” said one nurse.

Another said they believed that all NHS trusts should have a clinical nurse specialist in procurement “to assist in getting the best deals, without compromising patient care and retaining quality”.

The biggest barriers to nurses getting involved in purchasing were lack of time, rules preventing them from doing so and lack of support from their employer, the survey found.

One respondent said: "I think that nurses need to have the time to get involved, and this needs to be lead from the director of nursing."

Asked which types of products they felt could be purchased more efficiently at their organisation, 75% said dressings, 65% said gloves and 64% said disposable wipes. Incontinence products and syringes were also chosen by around half of respondents.

Starting next week, nurses will be encouraged to look for ways to save money on such essentials in a major campaign being launched by the RCN and NHS Supply Chain.

As [exclusively revealed by *Nursing Times* last July](#), the campaign's organisers estimate nurses working together with procurement managers could save more than £30m – the equivalent of 1,000 nursing jobs – by streamlining the purchasing of basics like wipes, incontinence products and cannulae.

The campaign, which was also developed with input from the Clinical Procurement Specialist Network, will be launched on 24 March and was the brainchild of Mandie Sunderland, director of nursing at Nottingham University Hospitals Trust.

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Janet Davies

Janet Davies, the RCN's director of nursing and service delivery, and the college's representative on the NHS Supply Chain's customer board, said: "Making the right choices about which equipment and supplies the NHS buys can make a huge difference to patient safety.

"Nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants use clinical products every day and they know what works best for patients, and which are easiest to use," she said.

She also highlighted that a third of what the average hospital spent on operating costs was used to buy clinical supplies.



"But nursing staff can feel that they don't have a role in addressing that," she said.

"Even when nursing staff do have a say in procurement, it's often very late in the process. We want nurses, midwives and HCAs involved from the start, and we want them to understand how important their opinions are.

"That's what this campaign is about," she said. "Because small changes really can make big differences, and everyone in nursing has a part to play."