

3 February 2017

Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into First 1,000 Days

The inquiry is looking at a number of specific areas, not all of which are relevant to the Royal College of Nursing. As such, we are submitting a number of general comments and observations below:

Health visiting services and Flying Start

- I. Health visiting services provide a vital level of support to young children and their families, both pre and postnatally and through working with midwives. The evaluations of Flying Start and Adverse Childhood Experiences show that investment and development in these areas should continue.
- II. However, whilst Flying Start and the enhanced health visiting programme has been shown to improve outcomes and have excellent results in some areas, there is also the risk that it creates health inequalities, with those not lucky enough to live in the appropriate postcode unable to access the support.
- III. Provision of speech and language support in the early years in areas that fall outside of the Flying Start areas can be patchy and inconsistent, with the additional support which some families require not always being made available. This also applies more generally to other areas in which families may need support and access to specialist services, but are not fortunate enough to live in Flying Start areas. A form of referral system by health visitors for those families who would benefit from the scheme might be one option worth investigating.

Accessing services and service availability

- IV. While targeted interventions are an essential component in supporting children and families with specified risk or need during the first 1000 days, it is also important to consider the needs of the wider population. For instance, those who either live outside of geographically targeted services, or those who fall below the criteria set for accessing targeted services despite having unmet needs.
- V. Housing can be a particular issue, especially when working with some of the poorest and most vulnerable families. Poor living conditions have a negative impact on mental health which can impact on parenting capacity which in turn can have a negative effect on child development and attachment, all of which can have long-term detrimental effects on the child and family.
- VI. Providing appropriate support for children and young adults with disabilities is vital, and greater levels of co-production are required to ensure services are designed to meet needs. As such, the level of support available to children with

disabilities and their families is in need of review, along with the workforce development and planning requirements to meet the needs of the population.

- VII. It is also essential that all public services relating to health and children, recognise the factors that adversely affect a child's well-being, and take children's needs into consideration when decision making and designing services.
- VIII. The availability of Welsh language services is key, particularly in areas such as speech and language therapies where provision in Welsh is not always available, and there is a definite need for improvement in this area.

Prevention & early intervention

- IX. The Royal College of Nursing would like to see full delivery of the aims in the Healthy Child Wales Programme. The importance of regular health visits and checks, particularly in the first 2 years of life, is crucial. Not only does this assist with instigating early help and intervention where necessary, but it also assists with school readiness so that a child is able to learn in the school environment from the outset. For instance, ensuring that a child will be able to see the blackboard, hear the teacher, and speak and communicate with peers.
- X. Young people are the parents of the future, and it is important that childhood and early life experiences help prepare them for this responsibility. The role of school nurses is critical in terms of helping build the resilience of young people so that their preparedness for adulthood and its responsibilities is enhanced. However, the workload of school nurses is often focussed on immunisation and other targeted interventions which, whilst being an important part of school nursing services, often means that there is little opportunity to undertake longer term, preventative and enabling work with young people.
- XI. The benefits of a fully enabled school nursing service, designed and predicated on the needs of the school aged population should be recognised. Examples where school nursing services have been developed through external funding streams can demonstrate positive results, and this supports the need to invest in young people ahead of parenthood.

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.