



Press release

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For immediate release

New research: The state of occupational health nursing in the UK

More than eight in 10 occupational health (OH) nurses in the UK do not feel represented by a professional body in OH nursing, and most do not feel professionally supported, new research published in the journal *Occupational Health [at Work]* reveals.

The research, believed to be the largest study of OH nurses ever carried out in the UK, assessed the views of 1,429 OH nurses responding to the nationwide survey.

It was conducted jointly by the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing Development Group and the independent OH research and publishing group The At Work Partnership. Its key aims were to analyse the state of OH nursing in the UK and to assess the need, feasibility and appetite for a new professional body – a Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing (FOHN) – to better represent practitioners in this important field.

Key findings of the survey include:

- An estimated 4,950 nurses are currently working in occupational health in the UK – around two-thirds (3,330) of whom are on the Specialist Community Public Health Nursing – Occupational Health (SCPHN-OH) part of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register
- Just 17% of OH nurses currently feel 'represented' by an OH body
- Only 44% of OH nurses say they feel 'professionally supported' at work
- Most OH nurses do not belong to a dedicated OH body or association, though the vast majority (93%) are members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)
- The RCN does not have a dedicated section for OH nurses (its Society of Occupational Health Nursing was wound up in 2009)
- Nine out of 10 OH nurses (87%) say a 'Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing' would benefit the future of OH nursing
- Three out of four OH nurses (74%) say they would join a FOHN; one in four are undecided, however, with cost of membership an important consideration
- According to respondents, the proposed FOHN could give 'a voice' to the profession, raise its profile and provide much needed professional support, guidance and resources for OH nurses.
- The most important priorities for a FOHN, as identified by respondents, should be the representation of OH nursing to key stakeholder groups and setting standards in OH education and professional practice.

FOHN Development Group chair Jo Berriman says: "The results of this survey underline the need to establish a national representative body for OH nurses to take this important profession forward in helping to improve the health of the working population.

"The landscape of work is rapidly changing, employers are seeking alternative health at work services and there is an increasing shortage of new OH nursing talent coming through to replace those who are now approaching retirement. Because OH nurses operate very differently to other nursing colleagues, the nature of our practice has often been misunderstood by professional and regulatory bodies alike. OH professionals need

representation by an organisation that truly understands the work we do and the challenges we face.

“The FOHN Development Group was established in response to calls for a new faculty to provide much needed direction, voice and unity for a profession facing important challenges. These research findings show just how vital those goals are.”

The report’s co-author, and editor of *Occupational Health [at Work]*, Dr John Ballard says: “The survey provides strong evidence that a FOHN would benefit the OH nursing profession and is much needed. There was an overwhelming level of support and enthusiasm for a new faculty among the 1,429 respondents to the survey. But organisations don’t survive on goodwill alone and the FOHN Development Group will now need to take some important decisions concerning the structure, function and financing of the proposed organisation in order to turn this ambitious project into a reality.”

Jo Berriman added: “The FOHN Development Group will be meeting with the FOHN Consulting Group and the FOHN Special Advisers in December 2016. Our inclination is to set up the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing as a small charitable organisation, select trustees, review the present vision, mission and strategy and develop a development plan accordingly. We will be looking for financial and non-financially based support to do this.”

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Notes for editors

1. The research is published in the October/November 2016 edition of the journal *Occupational Health [at Work]*. The journal is published by The At Work Partnership, London, an independent occupational health publishing, research and training organisation. www.atworkpartnership.co.uk/occupationalhealthatwork
2. Suggested citation: Ballard J, Coomer K. *The state of OH nursing: a national survey of occupational health nurses. Occupational Health [at Work] 2016; 13(3): 17–28.*
3. The online survey was conducted in April/May 2016. A total of 1,429 OH nurses responded.
4. The FOHN Development Group was set up in 2015 to explore the feasibility of developing a national professional body for OH nurses. It published a position paper in November 2015 on *Occupational Health nurse education, funding and regulation*: <http://www.fohn.org.uk/data/files/faculty-of-occupational-health-nursing-position-paper-final.pdf>

Occupational Health [at Work] is published by The At Work Partnership, an independent publisher, research and training organisation, specialising in occupational health and disability at work.

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