Nurse prescribing – a valuable asset

Nurses in the UK have some of the widest prescribing powers among the profession worldwide, with nearly 74,000 prescribers on the Nursing and Midwifery Council register.

In her feature on p24, Angela Dowden outlines the expanding role of nurse prescribers and comes up with some fascinating insights into how the role has developed over the last decade.

Since 2012, independent nurse prescribers have been able to prescribe from the entire BNF within their area of competence. For many in the profession this has been a welcome and empowering development and evidence shows widespread satisfaction with nurses’ new powers among both patients and medical colleagues.

There are also significant financial savings associated with allowing nurses this autonomy. NHS England has reduced costs by an estimated £777 million annually as a result of nonmedical prescribing, and a further £270 million could be saved if more GP surgeries employed nurse prescribers.

Much, of course, depends on the willingness of individual clinicians to extend their roles and undertake the necessary initial training and continuing professional development (CPD) to do so. Many in the nursing profession have shown commendable enthusiasm for this, but they must be supported if they are not to feel overburdened and exploited. Some nurses told Prescriber that they did not feel adequately mentored in their prescribing practice by their medical colleagues, mentioning financial and time constraints as obstacles to ongoing support.

As Angela Dowden points out, “nurses look more like doctors than ever before”, but is it fair to expect a relatively low-paid profession to take on the responsibility and potential liability of independent prescribing? One study revealed nurse prescribers citing increased responsibilities and lack of financial reward as disincentives.

Nurse prescribers are a considerable asset to the NHS and must be nurtured and valued as such if their goodwill and enthusiasm is to be retained.

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