

ABPN Background briefing on Community Children's Nursing

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) members about the provision of a comprehensive integrated community children's nursing service across the UK

Background

The establishment of a specific community nursing service for children can be traced back to the late 19th century, with a private nursing service provided by experienced children's nurses based at Great Ormond Street. By 1938, the service had expanded to around 30 nurses providing care to children in their own homes, with nurses sometimes living in to provide round the clock care. Several other children's hospitals established similar outreach provision prior to and following the establishment of the NHS.

Further examples of subsequent developments include:

Rotherham 1949 delivered by a Queens Nursing sister to address inpatient high infant mortality, with a focus on the care of children with acute infectious diseases, notably pneumonia, bronchitis, measles and gastro-enteritis.

Birmingham 1954 delivered by two District Nursing sisters focused on the care of children with acute infectious diseases referred predominantly by General Practitioners when the service was first established.

Paddington 1954 'Home Care Team' included three children's nurses and paediatricians providing care in the community in collaboration with General Practitioners. The focus was upon acute respiratory and gastro-intestinal problems, predominantly infections/contagious diseases. Over 50% of referrals were from GP's, with only 165 children from all referrals requiring admission to hospital.

Edinburgh 1969 where two separate teams were established to meet the needs of children and young people:

- an outreach service from the children's out-patient department for children with long term conditions, specifically coeliac disease and diabetes mellitus and congenital abnormalities such as cleft lip
- a District Nursing sister (a trained children's nurse) attached to the hospital who focused on those children referred to the hospital for acute care

Within two years, 5,700 home visits were made to children by these teams in comparison with the proceeding year whereby only 4 children were cared for by the local District nursing teams.

Southampton 1969 delivered by two Registered Children's Nurses who were also Queen's District Nurses to support the establishment of a newly opened Regional Centre for Paediatric Surgery. The team supported those children having day surgery for conditions which often required an in-patient stay of between 1 and 3 nights in other centres. By 1980 the service had expanded to cater for day surgery lists per week for general surgery, orthopaedics, ENT, plastics, ophthalmics, and genito-urinary surgery. Subsequently the service developed to encompass children having planned or emergency surgery, as well as acute and long-term medical problems.

A survey of Community Children's Nursing provision across England in 1988 noted that there were 23 services, of which 11 were provided by a single nurse. Most of the 45 community children's nurses were registered children's nurses¹.

Key health policy documents include:

- *The Welfare of Children in Hospital (Ministry of Health, 1959)*² which stated, 'Children should not be admitted to hospital if it can possibly be avoided.' (para. 17) and that 'Special nursing facilities for looking after sick children at home should be extended.' (paras. 18-19).
- *Inquiry on Health Services for Children and Young People in the Community: Home and school Health Committee House of Commons (1996-1997)*³ which encompasses evidence from the English National Board highlighted that 'the provision of acute, secondary health care services requires a different skill set from primary health care nursing offered by district nursing services'. Recommendations included:
 - All children requiring nursing interventions should have easy access to a Community Children's Nursing Service, staffed by qualified children's nurses supplemented by those in training, in whatever setting in the community they are being nursed
 - This service should be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
 - Every GP should have access to a named community children's nurse
 - Information about the service should be easily available to all relevant health care professionals and voluntary organisations
 - Co-ordination between agencies and professionals should be regarded as a necessary part of providing a good service (para 50)

¹ Most had completed RGN/RSCN training programmes. 22 of the staff were also qualified as District Nurses, 2 as Health Visitors and one held both DN and HV certificates. Only 2 had a degree and most had worked as a sister in a hospital previously. There was one Enrolled Nurse employed in a team.

² *The Welfare of Children in Hospital (Ministry of Health, 1959* <https://viewer.soton.ac.uk/records/ao-op1266065-100> 1

³ Health Committee 3rd Report (HC 314) Session 1996-1997 Inquiry on Health Services for Children and Young People in the Community: Home and School https://archives.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/GB61_HC_CP_12562a

- *The Patient's Charter—services for children and young people* outlined the rights and expectations for children and young people using the NHS, including care at home⁴
- *NHS at Home: Community Children's Nursing Services (Department of Health, 2011)*⁵ which outlined community children's nursing services as an integral component of integrated children's services to meet the needs of infants, children and young people in the community with:
 - acute illness and short-term needs, such as post-operative care at home
 - long-term conditions, including management of childhood asthma and bladder and bowel problems in children
 - children living with disabilities and complex needs, including continuing care and the care of neonates
 - life-limiting and life-threatening illness, including palliative and end-of-life care

Subsequent reports including National Children's Service Frameworks^{6,7} and Children and Young People's Health Outcomes publications⁸ reinforced the importance of integrated services for children and young people, as well as the key role of community children's nursing teams.

An effective and integrated community children's nursing service as outlined in *NHS at Home*⁹ would not only reduce inpatient, as well as emergency and outpatient attendances but a reduction in overall costs and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

An overview of the current situation across the UK

England

In 2006 a survey by the Royal College of Nursing found that there were 185 community children's nursing services in England. While there has therefore been expansion of Community Children's Nursing Services across England, there are many different models of provision, some of which are isolated and fragmented instead of an integrated and comprehensive service¹⁰. National or UK-wide robust data about the impact of community children's nursing services and referrals is somewhat limited,

⁴ Department of Health. (1996). *The Patients Charter—services for children and young people*. London, UK: HMSO

⁵ *NHS at Home: Community Children's Nursing Services* (Department of Health, 2011) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74aa2ee5274a52940692e1/dh_124900.pdf

⁶ National Service Framework: children, young people and maternity services <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-service-framework-children-young-people-and-maternity-services>

⁷ National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Service in Wales

⁸ Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-and-young-peoples-health-outcomes-forum-2014-to-2015>

⁹ *NHS at Home: Community Children's Nursing Services* (Department of Health, 2011) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74aa2ee5274a52940692e1/dh_124900.pdf

¹⁰ There are fragmented multiple separate community children's nursing teams delivering palliative care/hospice at home, hospital at home/virtual wards, as well as specialist teams/nurses i.e. Well Child, Diana Services delivering aspects of community children's nursing services

inhibiting clear demonstration of cost-effectiveness of an integrated comprehensive service.

Lord Darzi's investigation report¹¹ published in September 2024 clearly outlines that health systems in England including service provision in the community have failed children and young people, with

- 100,000 infants waited more than 6 hours in Emergency departments to be seen, with nearly 500,000 children and young people waiting more than four hours and 225,00 waiting more than six hours
- 40,000 children and young people waiting more than a year for access to community services
- 343,000 referrals for children and young people under the age of 18 are on waiting lists for mental health services, with 109,000 waiting more than a year for mental health support.

Wales

The Royal College of Nursing survey in 2006 found that there were 16 community children's nursing services in Wales. The lack of a national strategy has meant that services have been developed in an ad hoc way. There are however examples of integrated teams encompassing acute care, continuing care, specialist health visiting, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists for children and young people, as well as community paediatricians¹². Nevertheless, there are insufficient community children's nurses to meet children and young people's needs in Wales¹³.

Scotland

The Royal College of Nursing survey in 2006 found that there were 23 community children's nursing services in Scotland. Services have been developed in an ad hoc manner rather than in accordance with a national strategy. The need however far outweighs service provision.

Northern Ireland

The Royal College of Nursing survey in 2006 found there were 12 community children's nursing services in Northern Ireland. These services fit with overall regional strategies, and reduce hospital stays, they are often fragmented and underfunded.

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¹¹ [Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england)

[England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england>

¹² see <https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/our-services/children-young-people-family-health-services/cypf-complex-needs-disability/integrated-childrens-community-nursing-service/>

¹³ Royal College of Nursing (2001) Paper1 Community Nursing Teams: The Role of the District Nurse and the Community Children's Nurse <https://www.rcn.org.uk/wales/-/media/Royal-College-Of-Nursing/Documents/Countries-and-regions/Wales/2021/Community-Nursing-2021-English-FTFT.pdf>