

Accessible education for practice nurses

An innovative scheme is providing practices with in-house educational sessions conducted by local consultants, writes **Fiona Barr**

Pinpointing the right kind of continuing education and fitting it into a demanding work schedule can prove a headache for nurses working in primary care. However, an organisation that brings consultants to practices for educational sessions aims to provide a convenient solution.

Essentially Medical offers health professionals the chance to have local consultants deliver lunchtime educational meetings on practice premises. The meetings are free to practices because they are sponsored by pharmaceutical companies. A representative attends each meeting, but promotion is not a condition of the deal.

Improving relationships

The initiative enables GPs and nurses to meet and question the consultants to whom they refer patients, while helping consultants boost relationships with local practices. It provides pharmaceutical companies with the chance to support medical education in a way that is popular with healthcare professionals.

The concept was launched in north-west London two and a half years ago and has expanded to cover six more areas in and around London. The company has so far delivered at least 300 educational meetings to more than 50 practices.

Kamala Bissoo, a practice nurse at two surgeries in north London, is among those who have attended the meetings regularly over the past two years. 'We need to update constantly, but time is very precious,' she says. 'To have a service in-house and meet local consultants is excellent.'

A key component of the scheme is that only local consultants are

'We are all learning together'



Carmen Edwards: 'You know you are getting absolutely up-to-date advice'

Face-to-face access to consultants is rarely available to nurses working in primary care. This makes the educational sessions offered by Essentially Medical particularly useful, according to Carmen Edwards, a practice and district nurse at Mountfield surgery in Finchley, north London. She describes the meetings as an excellent and convenient method of keeping on top of the latest developments.

'This means we can get up-to-date information that is applicable to our area and local hospitals. Also, I can talk one to one with the consultants about any misconceptions and so on,' she says.

Ms Edwards explains that she and the GPs from her practice also use the sessions as an opportunity to discuss any particularly difficult cases with the consultants attending. 'It's good that we are all learning together and there is a lot of job satisfaction when you know you are being given absolutely up-to-date advice,' she concludes.

offered to practices. This means that the talks are given by the senior secondary-care doctors most likely to be caring for the practice's own patients.

Practices are able to suggest topics, or can give an entire meeting over to a question-and-answer session. GPs and nurses say it is also a chance to discuss any particular

problems they may have with specific patients.

Evelyn Diamond, a former marketing manager for a private hospital in north-west London, is the founder of the company. Consultants give their time free of charge, and Ms Diamond says many are happy to take part in order to improve relations with local prac-

tice teams and, potentially, to boost their private practice. There are now 100 consultants running sessions across London.

'We are very strict in that we take only one consultant per speciality in each area, as we don't want to play them off against each other,' says Ms Diamond. 'We normally start with about 12 consultants in an area, so we can offer practices a choice of different specialities, and then build it from there.'

Personal development

Dr Jyoti Sood, a GP at Newbury Park Health Centre in Greater London, says that the scheme has improved his surgery's personal development programme, which aims to meet the educational needs of the doctors, nurses and other staff. 'A lot of my time leading the programme used to be spent ringing reps and arranging food and speakers,' he says. 'This has taken all that away from me, so I can now use my time for other things.'

Mr Daryll Baker, a general and vascular surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in north London, a friend of Ms Diamond's, helped to formulate the original idea. He has been running sessions with local practices since Essentially Medical began and welcomes the opportunity to meet practice-based nurses during the sessions he leads.

'I find it very useful,' he attests. 'As a vascular specialist, I find a lot of the wider follow-up is nurse-led and an increasing amount of the job is being directed to nurses. If I meet a nurse who seems enthusiastic, I am also quite happy for them to have direct access to me.'

He adds that he is not concerned about the involvement of drug companies, because he is not being paid by them and is not compelled to communicate a particular message. 'I say whatever I want to say,' he says.

Other cities across the UK may soon benefit from the scheme: Glasgow is already top of the list, as one of the local consultants has expressed interest in becoming involved.

Resources

● www.essentiallymedical.co.uk