

## Information skills in the nursing workforce

The Information Strategy '[The power of information](#)' (Department of Health 2012) highlights the importance of managing information as the key for providing high quality, efficient health care to a population that is increasing in age and co-morbidity. Nurses will have a significant role to play helping patients to navigate through a world where they hold their own electronic health records, and have access to a variety of information sources. Our nursing workforce needs to have the skills and knowledge to meet these challenges in the NHS of the future. Job descriptions are a good way of assessing whether or not NHS employers have identified that skills in information and knowledge management are important for the nursing workforce.

We analysed 136 job descriptions selected at random from the NHS jobs website in January 2012. The core dimensions of the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) that relate to the effective use of Health Informatics skills (information processing, information collection and analysis, knowledge and information resources) and the core dimension of communication (which includes effective communication using technology) were used to code each job description.

Overall, there was little acknowledgement in the job descriptions of the requirement for wider information management and information and communication technology (ICT) knowledge and skills. The majority of job descriptions (113 or 84%) specified that individuals should have some skills in using information technology); of these a minority (16 or 12%) considered IT skills to be desirable rather than essential. It was of some concern that a small number (8 or 6%) of job descriptions asked for applicants to have achieved the [European Computer Driving License](#) (ECDL) either as an 'essential' or 'desirable' criteria; given that the ECDL ceased to be the recognised standard

for education in computer skills by the NHS in 2008. Few of the job descriptions actually recognised the use of ICT as a communication skill. Information given about data protection and confidentiality was normally lengthy and was often the only part of the job description that specifically mentioned electronic data. A small number of job descriptions (21 or 15%) did not mention confidentiality or data security at all or they mentioned the importance of confidentiality of patient data, but did not refer to issues to do with data security (13 or 10%). Just under half of job descriptions (65 or 48%) referred to the requirement for applicants to be able to collect, analyse and report data in order to carry out audit or contribute to service improvement. This requirement implies individuals have skills in information management and the use of ICT to support their practice (often this was not obvious in the job descriptions themselves). A fifth of job descriptions (25 or 18%) included electronic documentation in their outline of the role, with a further 10% mentioning some form of clinical information system elsewhere in the job description (often separate from the section on documentation).

## **Conclusions**

Although the majority of NHS trusts represented in the job descriptions used in this analysis recognise that their staff require skills in using Information Technology, and the increasing role ICT plays in health care, these were represented as very basic skills and a substantial minority (28% in total) either did not feel that they were required or not essential in order to fulfill a role as a Registered Nurse in today's NHS. This analysis indicates that NHS employers do not value or identify key skills in information management that are necessary to support nursing practice and are required by nurses to fulfill their role as information brokers, coordinators and navigators.

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