What does the election result mean for primary care nurses?

The Conservatives have said the busy working lifestyles of the British public demand a fresh approach to primary care, with traditional opening hours no longer suitable for those in full-time employment. Indeed, one of prime minister Cameron’s pledges is to enable patients to access their GP’s seven days a week, between the hours of 8am and 8pm, as well as guaranteeing a same-day appointment for anyone over the age of 75.

This extended access to primary care services should help to alleviate pressure on the critical care and emergency services across the UK, which are currently struggling to meet patient demand. Plans for these seven-day GP services are due to start immediately, but what impact will this have on community nurses?

CARE CLOSER TO HOME

We know that this focus on ‘care closer to home’ will mean a push to move patients from acute to primary care. As the backbone of the NHS, nurses — and in this case those working in the community — will receive an increasing amount of referrals resulting in a significant increase in their workload. With services already stretched to the limit and a lack of new nurses coming through the system, will the existing workforce be able to cope?

Speaking at the chief nursing officer’s summit in Manchester last December, Hunt acknowledged the need to attract more nurses to move care out of hospitals, saying: ‘What we need to make it possible is more district nurses, more practice nurses, more community nurses. We need a big, big push on nursing in the community,’ (‘Big push’ needed on community nurse numbers, says Hunt — nursingtimes.net).

The Conservatives have pledged £350 million for GP surgeries to develop and implement this — they hope that 18 million patients will have access to GP out-of-normal-hours services by the end of 2015/16, with all patients being able to access these services by 2020.

The population of the UK is constantly changing and evolving and the NHS must adapt to meet these needs in the best way it can. But one thing is for sure — the role of nurses must not be underestimated if the next five years are to be a success. The question is, are we ready for the challenge ahead?

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With the Conservative party defying the polls and exceeding the nation’s expectations by winning a clear majority, what could the next five years mean for the NHS and community nurses?

Under David Cameron’s leadership the newly formed government will look to forge ahead with the plans it already has in place and the re-appointment of Jeremy Hunt as health secretary will at least ensure a measure of continuity. It has been well documented that, before the election, the Conservatives pledged to ringfence NHS funding, leaving it exempt from the budget cuts planned for other services. The new government also pledged a funding increase of £2 billion in 2016 and £8 billion in total by 2020 — the minimum needed by the NHS to survive. This strategy focuses on supporting the plans already in place and following NHS England’s Five Year Forward View (www.england.nhs.uk).

The Five Year Forward View identifies the key role that primary care will play in the future NHS — especially in the prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions — leading to an increase in the services delivered in the community. GP surgeries, in particular, will be taking on further responsibility for the care of their patients.

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