



EDUCATION ISSUES

How the Enhanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner role has been integral to one tertiary unit's workforce plan and service delivery



Tracey Jones, RN Child, BSc Hons, MSc, ENNP, Lecturer in Neonatal Nursing^{a,*}, Christine Ashworth, MSc, PG Dip Ed, BScHons, RGN, RSCN, ENNP, Directorate Manager^b

^a *The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK*

^b *Newborn Intensive Care Unit, St Mary's Hospital, Manchester, M13 9WL, UK*

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Abstract This paper aims to raise awareness of the Enhanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner role and how this role has not only offered career development for neonatal nurses but has also been integral to the growth of a new model of working within a large Newborn Intensive Care Unit. Neonatal care has and continues to experience workforce challenges within the United Kingdom within both the medical and nursing fields (Watson et al., 2015). This paper will explore the evolution of two key nursing roles within the speciality of neonatal care, those of the Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner and the Enhanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner, which are being utilised to address some of these challenges. This article will discuss both roles and examine how the Enhanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner role has been developed to help address the medical workforce challenges and offer nursing career development within one trust in Greater Manchester.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that the NHS continues to change and evolve, and in many areas remains

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Tracey.m.jones@manchester.ac.uk (T. Jones), Christine.ashworth@cmft.nhs.uk (C. Ashworth).

under considerable workforce pressure. It is unarguable that changes need to be made and progression must be embraced. However, these dramatic transformations within health care have required the workforce to evolve and adapt to new challenges. For some years the development of neonatal nurses has had a clear pathway within the North West. Good engagement with local Higher education institutions have ensured the provision of educational courses to the level of qualification in neonatal speciality with further progression to either the enhanced neonatal nursing or advanced neonatal nursing qualification. This paper will examine some of the challenges related to career development within neonatal care and explore how roles have changed in order to meet workforce pressures associated with changing patient needs. These developments within health care have afforded the opportunity for the emergence of new roles within nursing, one of which has been the development of advanced nursing roles. The Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner role has been pivotal in reducing the gap between nursing and medical responsibilities. The integration of the ANNP role has ultimately lead to teams working closely together and an improvement of resources and service delivery. However, the initial reasons for the development of this role have often been debated and in some cases the changes have been linked to political motivation (Findlay, 2007). It can be argued that nurses being part of the medical workforce is not a new phenomenon as advanced practice nurses have been present since the 1960s (Morgan et al., 2012) and specifically in the area of neonatology in the United Kingdom since 1992 (Smith and Hall, 2011).

Advanced neonatal nursing practitioner roles

More recently the requirements of the European Working Time Directive, 2009 (European Commission, 2000), with its associated impact on the medical workforce have added motivation for neonatal teams to re-examine the role of the ANNP and invest in the recruitment and training of such roles. Neonatal care has long since been delivered by an array of multi disciplines and skilful practitioners and it must be argued that this role development has not been purely to accommodate medical shortage or political agenda but has been identified as one opportunity for nursing development and career advancement.

The ANNP role has undeniably been met positively and has developed into significant service development in some areas. The enthusiasm of nurses to develop and enhance their skills has seen the establishment of identified groups of professionals who work alongside medical staff in medical roles following completion of specialised qualifications.

The ANNP has long been recognised as an integral part of the workforce although there is no consensus about the exact service model in which they practice (BAPM, 2010). Furthermore the absence of a professional advanced practice register adds additional challenges to monitoring the full implementation of this role within teams or to quantify the number working in clinical practice (Smith and Hall, 2011).

Within most higher education institutions providing ANNP courses, the 'medical model' of training is delivered and individual provider trusts then adapt the role to meet specific service needs. Where this role is clearly identified and accountability defined this has manifested as autonomous practitioners with clear scope of practice and a core role within the multidisciplinary team. As a result, nursing colleagues have developed confidence in the ANNP role, assured not only by the structured training process but in the previous neonatal nursing background from which the practitioners have evolved. This appears to be substantiated in the work completed by Nicolson et al. (2005) which suggested that ANNPs are not merely a product of an educational course but a recipe of prior experience, personality and training.

Enhanced neonatal nursing practitioner roles

Alongside the development of the ANNP role, a further need was identified in the late 1990's of another core set of nurses who, following completion of the QIS, sought further academic study and career progression. This group did not wish to train as an ANNP but wanted to access a course that built on existing expert nursing skills and would equip them with the knowledge to manage wider aspects of the baby's care in a holistic manner.

The recognition of this educational gap led to the development of the Enhanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner (ENNP) course, previously validated by the then English National Board as the ENB R23 course. This tier of nurses are clearly

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