Join us to show your commitment to the eight high impact actions

Variations in practice must be eliminated to drive up quality care and cut costs. Nurses are ideally placed to lead this challenge, argue Katherine Fenton and Julie Halliday

The dual challenge for nurses and midwives of improving quality and productivity in the NHS is more important now than ever before. The last decade has seen unprecedented investment in the NHS, rising to £118bn in 2010-11. This investment was made to improve outcomes; now there is a need to keep improving quality while also improving productivity.

The coalition government is committed to reducing the national deficit; all public services, including the NHS, are to play their part in this. Nursing and midwifery workforces are seen by some as a relatively easy target, as they represent the largest single section of the NHS workforce. Our plea is that, rather than responding to others leading the challenge, nurses and midwives should take the lead. Those who remember the slash and burn method will welcome alternatives that keep patients at the heart of services and improve quality while also delivering cost reductions.

Poor quality is common and costly. Nurses at or near the front line are well placed to respond. Those who experience the highest quality of care.

The high impact actions, launched in November, are being led by the Department of Health, strategic health authority chief nurses and the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement. The NHS Institute published The Essential Collection on 28 June to inspire nurses and midwives and provide a range of live examples where quality has been improved and costs cut. The eight actions are not new, but their universal implementation could reduce variations and the costs associated with poor quality.

We should not assume all nurses and midwives are equipped for the challenges; improvement skills, including learning how to measure what we do, play a part. A refresher course on the key aspects of best practice in the eight actions is planned.

We ask you to join the "I am committed to HIAs" campaign. You can do this via the NHS Institute’s website (www.institute.nhs.uk) or by emailing hia@institute.nhs.uk.

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Everything has its time – the time has come for palliative care needs experience delayed hospital discharge? A team carried out an audit to discover why complex palliative care discharges are often delayed. Their findings and recommendations are revealed

Why do patients with complex palliative care needs experience delayed hospital discharge? A team carried out an audit to discover why complex palliative care discharges are often delayed. Their findings and recommendations are revealed

Using an accreditation scheme to demonstrate quality in mental healthcare settings

Demonstrating quality is an important aim for all healthcare services. An accreditation scheme allowed mental health services to show their strengths.

Dementia care 2: exploring how nursing staff manage challenging behaviour

The national dementia strategy calls for care homes to adopt a person centred approach to care planning. This study looks at whether this is being implemented

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See page 10 for a Practice Review article on one of the eight actions, nurse led discharge