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New Code Of Practice Covering Recruitment Of Overseas Healthcare Staff

A toughened-up code on international recruitment - preventing hospitals from actively recruiting nurses and other healthcare professionals from developing countries – was unveiled on 8th December by Health Minister John Hutton. The code will also apply to the independent sector following the pledge by the Independent Healthcare Forum¹ to sign up.

Mr Hutton also announced that all independent sector companies providing NHS care will sign up to the code of practice through stipulations in their NHS contract. The new code closes the loophole that allows Trusts to recruit temporary and locum staff from developing countries. It will be extended to cover 200 more recruitment agencies, to include agencies that supply domestic staff to the NHS.

Mr Hutton said the UK already led the way in terms of ethical recruitment, but the revised code would mean the independent sector, which has faced criticism for stripping developing nations of vital health professionals, would be covered.

The revised code will apply from December 2005².

John Hutton said:

“The UK already leads the way in terms of ethical recruitment practices. We were the first country to produce guidance on international recruitment based on ethical principles, the first to develop a robust code of practice for employers and the only country to publish an approved list of agencies. The revised code will mean the independent sector acts more ethically, but takes account of the right of individuals to move of their own volition. If someone makes a choice that they want to seek employment in a country like the UK it would not be right to have a law which says you cannot be employed in any capacity in the health service in our country.”

“The revised code will also close a loophole to prevent hospitals from actively recruiting temporary staff from developing countries because plainly it would not be right for this to take place.”

Sarah Thewlis, Chief Executive of the Nursing and Midwifery Council, said: “We welcome the revised code as it reflects best practice in the international recruitment of healthcare professionals. The NMC will continue to ensure that overseas staff are appropriately qualified and fit to practice in the UK.”

Frank Ursell, Chief Executive Officer of the Registered Nursing Home Association, said: “On behalf of the 5,000 independent nursing homes in England delivering long term care, the Registered Nursing Home Association welcomes the positive steps in the code.”

¹ the representative organisation of UK independent healthcare providers

² The new code can be accessed at <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

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“Nursing homes are dependent upon agencies also adopting the NHS principles of ethical recruitment and we have recommended to members that they should only engage those agencies who adhere to these ethical guidelines.”

Mr Hutton said that the independent sector will be offered access to the NHS's international recruitment programmes.

The code currently applies to 178 agencies and restricts recruitment from over 150 developing countries, including South Africa, other African nations including Ghana, Uganda and Malawi, and Asian countries.

The Department of Health also has recruitment agreements with the Philippines, Spain and India which allows limited recruitment from these countries.

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