

15 September 2017

**Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Health, Social Care & Sport Committee's inquiry into physical activity of children and young people**

The Royal College of Nursing is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. Whilst the terms of reference ask for consideration of a number of specific areas, our response will focus on a few overarching points relevant to the nursing profession.

- I. All health care professionals have a role in promoting public health and thus promoting healthy lifestyles. As the largest workforce working with children, their families and carers, the nursing workforce is ideally placed to play a key role in the healthy lifestyle agenda across all health care sectors and environments. In particular, Health Visitors and School Nurses who come into contact with children and young people at various stages through their lives, are well-placed to promote the benefits or maintaining active lifestyles and encouraging children and young people, and their families, to partake in regular physical activity.
- II. Health promotion is a fundamental part of nurse training and practice. However, decreasing numbers of nurses, the lack of additional targeted training and capacity within their day to day role, can have an impact on nurses' ability to interact with children and their family or carers in a way which effectively promotes behaviour change if/where it is needed. Ensuring that the workforce is sufficiently resourced and employed in sufficient numbers is essential to enabling nursing teams to build supportive and effective relationships, and to Make Every Contact Count.
- III. It is also necessary that the activity of promoting health and wellbeing are not seen as a separate public health initiative, but as part of what the nursing profession does, implicitly within their role. Adopting this approach will allow nurses to move to a position where discussion of lifestyle and wellbeing is routine, non-judgemental and integral to everyone's professional and social responsibility.
- IV. Over a quarter (26.2%) of 4 – 5 year old children in Wales are classified as overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>, and the situation in this regard is worse in Wales than it is in the rest of the UK. This data is via a one-off height and weight measurement taken of 4 – 5 year olds as part of the Child Measurement Programme (CMP).
- V. The Welsh Government may want to consider funding School Nursing Services to carry out, as a minimum, a second measurement (e.g. in Year 3 of school) of height and weight to add to this data collected via the Child Measurement Programme (CMP). Currently the CMP is carried out at reception class age (4 –

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/67762>

5 years) and as a one-off measurement the data collected gives no indication of trends throughout primary school aged years or of the effectiveness of any measures taken to tackle obesity in children. It is understood that undertaking sufficient levels of physical activity can be one way in which obesity levels can be tackled; collecting a minimum second round of measurements when children are a bit older, could provide a measure of effectiveness of physical activity and/or the outcome of lack of physical activity.

- VI. In this way, the additional information would also provide useful evidence on which to base future approaches, both in terms of this work and the obesity agenda. The additional measurement sessions would be carried out in line with prudent principles, via a workforce with appropriate skill mix, and would provide more robust detail of the obesity status of children in the early years of education. The intelligence provided by the data could also inform whether, in future, additional measurements should be undertaken throughout school life to evidence the outcomes and effectiveness (or otherwise) of current approaches.

#### About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.