

## A national training curriculum for nurses working in kidney care

Training is an essential part of every nurse's career, but at the moment there is no official training available for renal nurses. In this article, ANN UK Executive Board Member Marissa Dainton gives a personal reflective account of the need for a nationally recognised training curriculum for nurses working in kidney care, and outlines plans to address this need

■ training ■ curriculum ■ accreditation ■ nurses

If you've been working in renal care for many years, you will know that up until 2002, there was a nationally accredited course for renal nurses, established under the auspices of what was the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB). Those who have been active in renal nursing for 20 years or more will recall being expected to complete their ENB 136 Renal Course in order to advance their career. The course was a mixture of theoretical-based learning and practice-based competencies, delivered in the hospital setting and run by educators linked to renal units. Later iterations of the course were often linked to university Continuous Professional Development (CPD) pathways, enabling participants to accredit their learning towards a degree. To meet the competencies, it was necessary to spend some time working across the full range of renal settings, meaning once completed, participants had demonstrated understanding and competency across the renal field, rather than specialising in one area, such as haemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis or transplantation.

In the early days of my renal career, a local ENB 136 was not available to me,

so myself and my colleagues worked with the local university to develop and accredit a module that would fulfil this purpose. After helping to develop the course, I then studied through its first iteration. The course ran one more time, and then, with the advent of the Nursing and Midwifery Council, all the national accreditation of specialist nursing courses was discontinued, and it was left to individual units or universities to create their own courses.

The lack of a national course meant that universities were free to create their own renal modules, as opposed to a renal course in the traditional sense. However, with no national standards or accreditation, their format and content vary considerably. Some, like the old ENB 136, still include practice competency elements, whereas others are more academic, with work-based competencies more often left to the individual renal units' in-house training.

In some ways, of course, this a good thing, as it allows course providers to work with local renal teams to design courses that are best suited to the needs of the local service. Many of the modules are now offered at Master's level as well as at first degree level, meaning they can form part of a larger programme of study and sometimes lead to renal endorsement on BSc and MSc qualifications.

However, in many areas, locally-based courses are no longer available, and the challenging financial environment within the NHS has led to cuts in CPD budgets, which often make it difficult for these courses to remain viable. A recent survey

carried out by the British Renal Society (BRS) Education committee via Survey Monkey showed that of 106 renal nurses who responded, over 35% had no access to a local, university accredited, renal module.

When asked about more extensive renal courses, over 40% of nurses had no access to local provision. Perhaps even more revealing was a question about the funding of courses. Only 64% of those surveyed even answered this question. Of those who responded, 55% said their trust would fund their course. This figure highlights the reduction in available funding, which, at a cost of around £800, can limit access for some nurses to one module per academic year. However, in many instances, even where trust-based funding is available, this is often only possible through applying to charitable funds, and staff are often asked to contribute considerable amounts of the cost themselves. Another barrier can be the difficulty in releasing staff from the workplace to undertake study, particularly in the current climate, where so many areas are short-staffed. As with funding, nurses are often expected to bear some or all of this burden themselves, by studying in their own time.

In the face of dwindling budgets and closure of external courses, many renal departments run their own in-house training programmes, as a way of maintaining staff knowledge and competence. Indeed, of those who responded to the BRS survey, nearly 20% indicated that the training they were able to access was organised in-house.

### Marissa Dainton

ANN UK Executive Board Member; Senior Lecturer, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent  
Email: [marissa.dainton@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:marissa.dainton@canterbury.ac.uk)

However, in many cases, training can lack any form of accreditation and to some degree, the wider credibility that comes with credit-bearing university-based courses and modules.

So, given the squeeze on CPD budgets and lack of any national accreditation system for renal courses, what is the way forward?

ANN UK are working with the Education Committee of the BRS, OCB Media (national platform for e-learning) and others to develop a national curriculum for renal nurses that can fill the gap left by the long demised ENB 136. 98% of the nurses in the BRS survey agreed that there was an appetite for a nationally recognised renal course. It is hoped that such a programme will be available through distance learning using e-learning technology as well; however, opinion is divided on this, with 40% of nurses in the survey reporting that they did not think e-learning would be

a suitable platform for the course. This suggests the need for a flexible approach to cater for varying learning styles. An e-learning platform could serve well for many, especially where no university-based course is locally available. This style of course is also likely to be significantly less demanding on CPD budgets and would be flexible, because staff could choose when to study. ANN UK is seeking to work with one or more higher education institutions to accredit the curriculum/course to give greater accessibility, credibility and potential credits towards further qualifications.

ANN UK hopes that such a curriculum would also form the basis for academics developing and updating university-based, face-to-face courses by providing the latest evidence-based learning needs for nurses working in kidney care. A subgroup of the ANN UK Executive Board has been tasked with initially developing

the programme, and it is then anticipated that qualified experts will be recruited to ensure that the curriculum developed is built on—and sticks to—the latest evidence-based practice. The programme will seek to develop not only a base of necessary theoretical knowledge, but also practice-based competencies. It is hoped that by incorporating the latest evidence, the course will form a repository for renal teams when devising and updating their own competencies.

Some of the challenges ANN UK and BRS face in this project relate to funding the work to develop the course, costing it so it is accessible, and ensuring that it meets the needs of the whole renal nurse community.

So, if you think a national, accredited, renal nursing curriculum is long overdue, please contact ANN UK ([info@ann-uk.org](mailto:info@ann-uk.org)) with any ideas or suggestions, and watch this space for more information coming soon. **JKC**



Follow us on Twitter  
**@JKidneyCare**  
and join the conversation

