NEWS RELEASE FROM THE
REGISTERED NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION

Issued 31st January 2006

CLAIMS OF OVER-USE OF DRUGS DISMISSED -
RNHA CALLS FOR MAXIMUM COLLABORATION BETWEEN
LOCAL NHS PHARMACEUTICAL ADVISERS AND NURSING
HOME PROVIDERS

The Registered Nurse Home Association’s chief executive officer, Frank Ursell, has
expressed alarm that a Liberal Democrat MP’s erroneous theories about alleged
overuse of drugs in nursing homes for older people are still being bandied about.

The continued peddling of these theories was, said Mr Ursell, tantamount to a
crude assassination for Britain’s nursing and medical professions. The time had
come for the public debate over medicines management in nursing homes to move
from the ‘fanciful to the realistic’.

Mr Ursell was referring to claims by Liberal Democrat health spokesman Paul
Burstow that anti-psychotic drugs are widely used in nursing homes to subdue people
unnecessarily.

Said Mr Ursell: “Medicines used by older people in nursing homes are prescribed by
GPs in response to individual clinical need. That applies just as much to drugs for
mental health needs as to drugs for the treatment of heart disease, chronic obstructive
pulmonary disease, diabetes, asthma or rheumatoid arthritis.”

He added: “GPs are not going to prescribe anti-psychotic drugs for patients who do
not need or benefit from them. Nor are qualified nurses going to administer drugs
which they believe may be harmful to their patients.

“There are clear clinical protocols which have to be adhered to, whether someone is
resident in a nursing care or is living in their own home. Is Mr Burstow suggesting
that there is somehow a conspiracy by doctors and nurses across Britain to keep older
people drugged? If he is, that is as preposterous as it is slanderous.”

The RNHA’s own policies and procedures manual, which it recommends to all
nursing homes, lays down strict guidance on the use of drugs, stressing that prime
responsibility for prescribing to patients lies with GPs and that nursing homes should
seek advice from pharmacists regarding policies for ensuring the safe and appropriate
use of medicines.
The RNHA manual stipulates that nursing home staff should monitor their patients’ condition on a regular basis in respect of any medication they are taking and should contact their GP if they have any concerns about changes in an individual’s condition.

Said Mr Ursell: “To suggest that as many as 26,000 older people in care homes are inappropriately sedated at any one time, as Mr Burstow and other appears to be inferring, is flying in the face of reality. I challenge Mr Burstow to come with me on unannounced visits to any of our members’ nursing homes and to find patients who have been given drugs simply to keep them quiet.”

He added: “Far from wanting their patients to be inactive and incapacitated by drugs, nursing homes prefer their patients to be as mentally and physically active as possible. Equally, they have a duty to ensure that individuals’ medication needs are met. Under-use of necessary medication would be as undesirable as over-use.”

The RNHA encourages its members to co-operate fully with local primary care trusts’ pharmaceutical advisers in regular medication reviews which ensure that patients are receiving the most appropriate drugs for their conditions and that, where those conditions change over time, drugs do not continue to be prescribed unnecessarily.

The association says it plans to write to primary care trusts and local NHS boards throughout the UK to express its strong support for close co-operation between their pharmaceutical advisers and local nursing home providers on medication policies and procedures.

END

Notes to editors:

1. The RNHA is the largest organisation in the UK representing the interests of nursing home providers.

2. Its *Policies and Procedures Manual*, published in 2002, sets out detailed recommendations relating to patient care, information, quality improvement and management arrangements. It is available in hard copy format as well as on CD-ROM.

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