The organisation representing around 1,000 nursing homes in the UK has welcomed a call from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) for public funding to be increased to meet the challenges of looking after increasingly dependent older people needing ‘round the clock’ care.

The Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) says the college’s plea to the government and local authorities for more money to be invested in the care of the elderly adds to the weight of reports from a range of other organisations that have highlighted the inadequacy of current arrangements.

“The link between funding and quality is inescapable,” said RNHA chief executive officer Frank Ursell. “RCN members are right to be concerned about the enormous pressures on care homes, which are expected to deliver high quality services for people with increasingly complex health and social needs at a time when the public bodies that fund a majority of care home places are cutting back on the resources they invest. Policy makers need to know that this scenario cannot continue indefinitely.”

He added: “We agree with the RCN that care home residents’ complex care needs are not reflected in the funding provided from the public purse, and that greater investment is also needed in the vital NHS community health services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and dietetics, that many of our residents require. Let us hope that the latest RCN report will help push the government into action.”

The RNHA also agrees with the RCN that extra funding is needed specifically to strengthen training and boost staffing levels by improving recruitment and retention.

“Too many care home staff are paid too little for the important tasks they carry out,” said Mr Ursell. “We concur with the RCN that better remuneration and training are vital for the future of the long-term care sector. For this to happen, the government and local authorities will have to pay a higher contribution to costs.”

Mr Ursell stressed that care home operators and their staff were very committed to delivering the best possible service to their residents.

“This is reflected in the RCN survey of its own members,” he said. “Around eight of ten nurses who responded thought the quality of care in their own organisation was good, despite the financial challenges they faced. This in itself is a credit to all those concerned.

“The figure broadly reflects what care home residents themselves felt in a survey of their expectations and experiences carried out by the Personal Social Services
Research Unit at the University of Kent. Around eight to nine out of ten residents reported that their experience of living in a care home had generally been good.”

However, Mr Ursell acknowledged the mounting concern among care home owners, managers and staff about their continuing ability to absorb all the pressures without the necessary resources to do the job well. He urged health ministers to listen to the RCN’s call for action.

END

Notes to editors:

1. A report by the Royal College of Nursing on the views and experiences of frontline nursing staff in care homes in England – *Persistent Challenges to Providing Quality Care* – was published on 14th March 2012.

2. A report by the PSSRU at the University of Kent for the Registered Nursing Home Association – *Study of Care Home Residents’ and Relatives’ Experiences*, was published in December 2011.

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