

News release



28 February 2005

SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

The February meeting of the Southern Health & Social Services Council heard about the contribution made to Health & Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland by staff from overseas. Speaking after the meeting, Mrs Lynne Cairns, Chairman of the Council said, "The Southern Health & Social Services Council is very aware that non-national staff are an important source of skilled workers particularly for our local hospitals. The Council was keen to hear about the experiences of these workers and as part of our role in monitoring the delivery of health and social care services, understand how the Council can support an inclusive working environment for all staff."

The public meeting was attended by workers from overseas, Trust managers responsible for equality and integration, staff working with black and minority ethnic communities and representatives from the local community.

The Meeting heard about the challenges facing Boards and Trusts as employers and service providers – and the barriers put in the way of those who come to live and work in Northern Ireland on a short term or

permanent basis. Caroline Cullen, Equality Manager at the Southern Health and Social Services Board, told the meeting, “Five years ago there were three known spoken languages in the Southern Board’s area (English, Irish and Chinese) – now there are twenty-eight”, and added, “The Board supports the Regional Interpreting Service but would like greater access to interpreters at weekends, in the evenings and at holiday times”.

Council member, Nazy Harris, told the meeting about her recent experience in Bulgaria. She explained how difficult it is to get even basic health care if you do not know the language and cannot access an interpreter.

Concerns were raised about the exploitation of some migrant workers and the needs of those who come into the country illegally.

A nurse from the Philippines, who has worked in Daisy Hill for two years, said that she had not experienced any discrimination and talked about the help she received from staff and managers. She described her co-workers as supportive and said that Newry was a good place to live and work – but indicated that she was aware that nurses in other areas had experienced problems.

Council Member, Annie Burrell, has worked with the Vietnamese Community for many years, and she acknowledged that it takes time for people to learn about each others customs and traditions. She commended the work of the Lay Health workers and the Ethnic Minority Forum in the Craigavon and Banbridge CHSS Trust area.

Grace Hamilton, BME Health Visitor spoke about the work she and Lay Health Workers, Inez Keenan (Traveller Community) and Gloria Darocha (Chinese Community), are doing on needs assessment, service provision and service uptake.

The Council was congratulated by Paul Yam, Director of Wah Hep and Northern Ireland Equality Commissioner, on the event; but he indicated there was much work still to be done. He stressed the importance of inclusiveness, “We need to stop using the terms “These People” and “Those People”, he said. He told the meeting that people need accessible, user friendly services, “Trusts, Boards and Councils will have to work more closely to achieve this, but resources are stretched and it will require additional funding from Central Government”.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

- **The Southern Health and Social Services Council is one of 4 Health and Social Services Councils set up in 1991 to represent the views of patients and users of the health and social services. The Council has a total of 24 members, 40% of whom are nominated by District Councils in the Southern Area. The remainder are appointed by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – 30% voluntary/community representatives and 30% are nominees with an interest in health and social care.**

- **Health and Social Services Councils have a right to be consulted by Health and Social Services Boards about and plans for development of services, or where significant changes are being considered. Councils play an important part in representing the views of consumers of services to the decision makers, and provide advice and support to patients and service users in relation to complaints procedures.**

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