

## Review calls for basic training for healthcare assistants

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All healthcare assistants in England should undergo basic training before they can care for patients unsupervised, an independent review has concluded.<sup>1</sup>

The Cavendish review was carried out in the wake of Robert Francis QC's inquiry into Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and reports of failings in other hospitals and care homes such as Winterbourne View.<sup>2</sup>

It says that more than 1.3 million unregistered healthcare assistants and support workers carry out the bulk of hands-on care in hospitals, nursing homes, or care homes or in the houses of individuals who need help to live independently.

Healthcare assistants carry out basic care such as feeding and washing patients but some perform more advanced tasks, including female catheterisation, cannulation, and applying complex dressings. Yet currently there is no consistent or compulsory training and no national job descriptions. Some staff are given only a training DVD to watch before starting work.

The review says that in the NHS 12 hour shifts have become the norm. But it questions whether such long working hours are compatible with maintaining compassionate care, especially when looking after patients with complex needs.

Its main recommendations are:

- Common training standards leading to a Certificate of Fundamental Care
- Job progression through a Higher Certificate of Fundamental Care, which can be a route into nursing training, and

- The legal processes for challenging poor performance to be reviewed so that unsatisfactory staff can be identified and removed.

Camilla Cavendish, a journalist and author of the review, said, "The airline industry figured out 30 years ago that the most junior staff could be a critical link in the passenger safety chain. Patient safety in the NHS and social care depends on recognising the contribution of support workers, valuing and training them as part of a team."

The government will produce a formal response to the review along with its response to the Francis report in the autumn. England's health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, welcomed the review and said that it highlighted some of the best practices. "But it also shines a light on how disconnected the health and social care systems can be and the stark variations in training that staff receive."

Peter Carter, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, also welcomed the review. But he said, "The priority must now be to underpin the recommendations made by Camilla Cavendish in the regulatory structure which governs care."

- 1 Department of Health. The Cavendish review: an independent review into healthcare assistants and support workers in the NHS and social care settings. 10 Jul 2013. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-healthcare-assistants-and-support-workers-in-nhs-and-social-care](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-healthcare-assistants-and-support-workers-in-nhs-and-social-care).
- 2 Ferriman A. Recommendations of the Francis Report. *BMJ* 2013;346:f854.

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