Educating for a Different Future: Transforming Nursing, Midwifery and AHP Education for Contemporary Health and Social Care

Health and social care services continue to face significant challenges including workforce shortages, increasing patient complexity, rising demand and ongoing financial pressures. At the same time, expectations of healthcare professionals are changing as services respond to advances in technology, changing population needs and new models of care. These developments raise important questions about whether current approaches to nursing, midwifery and allied health professional (NMAHP) education remain fit for purpose.

This keynote explored the future of NMAHP education in the context of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and wider developments across health and social care. Particular attention was given to the three shifts outlined by NHS England: moving care closer to home, moving from analogue to digital healthcare, and moving from treatment towards prevention and early intervention. Collectively, these changes have important implications for workforce development, professional preparation and educational provision.

The presentation examined a range of current and emerging issues including curriculum reform, programme approval and modification processes, practice learning experiences, placement capacity, simulation-based education and the future role of practice learning hours within professional programmes. Consideration was also given to widening participation, degree apprenticeships, postgraduate entry routes and flexible pathways into professional registration.

A central theme of the session was whether some traditional approaches to professional education remain appropriate for the future workforce. Whilst professional standards, public protection and patient safety must remain paramount, there is also a need to consider how educational programmes can adapt to better meet the needs of patients, communities, employers and the professions.

The future sustainability of health and social care will depend on how effectively we prepare the next generation of nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals. Universities have a key role in ensuring educational provision remains relevant, responsive and aligned to workforce need. In England, this will require programmes to continue evolving in line with the priorities outlined within the NHS 10 Year Health Plan.