Exhibition puts spotlight on nursing history

THE RCN is hosting an exhibition on mental health nursing at its London headquarters. ‘Out of the asylum: the history of mental health nursing’ details changes in the profession from Victorian times to the present day.

Exhibits include documents from the RCN’s archives, an electroconvulsive therapy machine from the 1960s, and archaic documents, such as a ‘handbook for attendants of the insane’ and ‘rules on bathing’.

RCN mental health forum member Cris Allen, who is consultant editor of Mental Health Practice, said: ‘It is an interesting journey, punctuated by significant events and legislation. The whole landscape has been changing for more than 100 years and we wanted to find a way of portraying the history of mental health care across the UK.’

RCN history of nursing forum member Claire Chatterton said the history of mental health nursing is ‘complex and controversial’ and it is vital to present it in a balanced way.

‘People often equate the past with bad practice, but there were positives too, and examples of people doing good work in difficult circumstances, much like today,’ Dr Chatterton said.

Infrared cameras will help keep an eye on patients at night

A HIGH-SECURITY psychiatric hospital in England plans to trial the use of infrared cameras to monitor patients’ vital signs and help nurses with the early detection of deteriorating ill health.

Broadmoor Hospital, in Berkshire, is currently recruiting 20 staff volunteers and 20 patient volunteers as part of a pilot study testing the use of special cameras on one of its wards for 40 nights. The trial, being run in partnership with the company Oxheath, follows a small-scale ‘controlled’ study undertaken by the hospital in January to assess the accuracy of the cameras’ monitoring.

At Broadmoor Hospital, nurses undertake patient observations regularly – every 15 to 30 minutes – to monitor vital signs such as heart rate, respiration and blood pressure. The cameras have software that monitors the patients’ movement and breathing for signs of distress, as well as heart rate and patient mood, which means that patients can be monitored in an unobtrusive, non-contact way.

Broadmoor Hospital interim service director Neil Ragoobar, a nurse who is the project’s operational service lead, said the unobtrusive nature of the cameras should allow patients to sleep better, with fewer interruptions.

‘The benefit of this technology is that it is less intrusive and does not disturb the patient,’ he said. ‘They are likely to get a better night’s sleep, which is important for patients who have mental illness or disorder problems. It enables them to be more alert and positive.’

One in five people in Northern Ireland has a mental health problem, according to research by Queen’s University Belfast. The study, which was carried out on behalf of the charity Action Mental Health, says that mental health problems are now regarded as one of the four most significant causes of ill-health and disability in the country, alongside cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and cancer. The charity’s chief executive David Babington said Northern Ireland needs a ‘functioning government’ that could tackle mental health issues and ‘help charities provide services across the region’.

A project at Edge Hill University is helping people in Mysore, India, by improving mental health interventions. A team from the Lancashire university’s faculty of health and social care has already trained 120 staff champions in India who can undertake mental health assessments for patients in hospital settings. The training focuses on people who have attempted suicide or are at a vulnerable stage of their lives. According to the World Health Organization, India has the world’s highest suicide rate, and Mysore is one of the worst affected regions.

Senior lecturer Steve Jones said: ‘The next stages will be to explore what leads to suicide attempts and how community support after the attempt can be started.’

Anxiety UK has funded the Institute of Mental Health to develop peer support training for people with anxiety. A research project has been designed to help understand what form peer support should take for those who are unable to attend traditional face-to-face groups or training because of their anxiety issues. For more information on the aims of the project go to www.institutemh.org.uk