

Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists



Close
the gap

Keep up the noise around pay

While the Autumn Budget raised hopes of a pay rise for nursing staff, the RCN has concerns about some of the conditions that may be attached

During his Budget speech, Chancellor Philip Hammond acknowledged the “tireless efforts” of nursing staff and said additional funding would be provided for any pay increase recommended by the independent NHS pay review body (PRB).

But supporting documents also outlined how such funding is likely to be dependent on improving productivity in the NHS, raising concerns about the demands which could be placed on a nursing workforce already stretched to the limit.

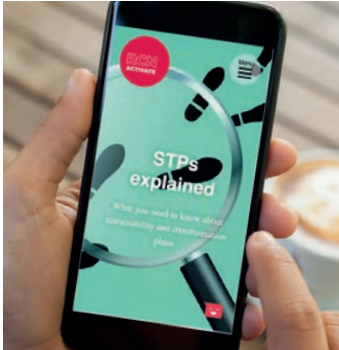
RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Janet Davies said the promise of additional money was welcome, but that references to productivity “run the risk of insulting nurses who regularly stay at work unpaid after 12-hour shifts”.

The RCN is currently preparing to submit its evidence to the PRB, which is expected to make a recommendation on any potential pay rise for staff in the spring. At the same time, it is asking the Government to be clear about the productivity improvements they say they want.

Associate Director of Employment Relations Josie Irwin said: “With uncertainty still surrounding the Government’s intentions, it’s vital that members continue to keep nursing in the spotlight. Activists have a key role to play in this.

“Continue to talk to your MP about your working conditions, the impact on patients and the importance of a fair pay award for 2018. Get other members involved in MP visits and use Facebook and Twitter to make sure nursing remains at the forefront of the Government’s considerations. We need them to know we’re not going to be fobbed off by kind words in the Budget.”

Activate goes online



You can now get your monthly fix of *Activate* features online. With the launch of a new digital platform, RCN Magazines, you can access content from all the RCN's membership publications with the click of a mouse or the swipe of a screen.

The new site is responsive, so whether you're reading it on your phone, tablet or computer you'll be able to enjoy articles, picture galleries and multimedia content in an attractive, accessible format. www.rcn.org.uk/magazines

Reasonable adjustments

New RCN guidance will support members affected by disability or ill-health. Produced by the RCN's Peer Support Service, the guidance will help members to make changes at work that allow them to do their job to the best of their ability.

There's also information for line managers and anyone else looking to support members with health or disability issues.

Download the guide from www.rcn.org.uk/publications by searching for publication code 006 595.

So near and yet so far

The fact that Chancellor Philip Hammond spoke specifically about nurses' pay in his Autumn Budget shows how effective RCN campaigning has been. Our messages have been getting through, but the fight is far from over.

Though Hammond pledged to fund a pay rise from new funds for the NHS, he also said that money is dependent on whether talks about pay structure modernisation "bear fruit", creating fears about the erosion of terms and conditions for NHS nursing staff.

So what are these talks?

"Official talks with the Government haven't yet started," reassured RCN Associate Director of Employment Relations Josie Irwin. "RCN Council would have to agree any move to negotiations. But for the past two years, NHS staff side (made up of the lead negotiators from the 14 trade unions that represent people who work in the NHS including the RCN) have been in exploratory discussions with Government officials about possible reforms to Agenda for Change.

"These include reducing incremental points, making it quicker to get to the top of each band and getting rid of overlaps between pay bands, so that promotion is rewarded and means something. Our view is that this would be beneficial for staff, help recruitment and retention, improve the dire staffing situation and ultimately be good for patients."

Meanwhile, the annual NHS pay review process will proceed in parallel. The RCN will submit written evidence in December, provide oral evidence in the New Year, and await the recommendation of the PRB in spring.

Because of the unexpected General Election and protracted Budget process, an announcement about the pay award for 2018/19 is likely to be later than usual next year, probably May, at which point RCN Council will consult members.

"If the RCN does enter formal talks, we will need to learn from other high profile negotiations, watch out for attempts at misinformation through the media and be ready to rebut misinformation with fact," added Josie.

Assaults bill success

Plans to make it a specific offence to assault health care staff have moved a step closer thanks to the RCN and its members.

The proposals form part of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill, which is currently passing through Parliament.

The bill initially just covered emergency clinical workers, meaning only A&E nursing staff would have been protected by it. But after lobbying from the RCN an amendment was added to the bill, expanding it to cover all nursing and other staff employed to provide NHS-funded care.

Kim Sunley, RCN Senior Employment Relations Adviser, said: "Being assaulted at work is a constant threat for thousands of health workers, and it's not confined just to those dealing with emergencies. The RCN has been working hard to extend the scope of this bill to include as many of our members as possible, and these efforts have paid off.



"This amendment is a significant step towards protecting nursing staff – violence is still too often seen as 'part of the job' by employers and the authorities.

"This legislation is long overdue and the RCN will continue to work with MPs to secure the best result for our members."

The bill will now enter the report stage, which means MPs will have another chance to discuss it and table amendments, although this is not likely to happen until the spring.

New Chair of RCN Council elected



Maria Trewern, née Nicholson, has been elected to lead the RCN's governing council from January

Maria became a nurse in 1977 and has been an RCN lead steward and safety representative. She has extensive experience in the NHS and independent sector specialising in workforce strategy, development and staffing levels, and has an MSc in Healthcare Management.

"I have huge belief in the RCN," said Maria. "I want it to be a powerful organisation whose dual role as a trade union and professional body continues to be its unique strength. I will make

sure it delivers what it should do for members, without whom there would be no College."

Maria sat on the Congress Agenda Committee, which helps organise the RCN's flagship annual event, between 2002 and 2005, and from 2009 to 2011. She is also a former chair of the Buckinghamshire branch and in 2013 was elected to the RCN South East Board.

Maria takes up her new two-year post from the beginning of January.

Vice Chair

The new Vice Chair of Council is Richard Jones MBE, who represents Wales on RCN Council. Richard has over 40 years' experience in nursing and nursing education.

Between 1990 and 2010 (when he retired) he worked for RCN Wales, latterly as the Deputy Director and Head of Employment Relations, with responsibility for introducing Agenda for Change into the NHS in Wales.

He is currently Chair of the Cwm Taf branch and has previously served as Vice Chair of the RCN Wales Board.

Dave Dawes will continue as RCN Honorary Treasurer. He was elected unopposed.

Huge drop in applications to study nursing

The RCN has said the future supply of nurses remains in peril after UCAS figures showed an 18% drop in the number of people applying to study nursing this year. While this has not translated to a drastic decline in the number of students actually starting nursing courses, it continues a worrying trend. "Ministers said the removal of the student bursary would mean 10,000 more nurses, and promised a 25% increase in training places this year. This has not happened," said Lara Carmona, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the RCN.

Members' champion

Gerry O'Dwyer, RCN National Officer in the Employment Relations Department, has won the Members' Award for Outstanding Customer Service at the RCN Staff Awards for Excellence.

A familiar face to many activists, Gerry has worked on a lot of RCN campaigns and is always on hand to provide advice about current issues and key changes.

He said: "This is particularly personal for me as I've been an activist with the RCN since 1988 and worked for the College for more than 20 years. I'm very proud to get this award for supporting our members."

This year's Members' Award for Outstanding Customer Service was sponsored by Medisa.

Taking the message to the top

RCN activist Peggy Pryer (pictured right) made her views on local health care known to Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt last month.

Peggy, secretary of the campaign group Concern for Health in East Kent (CHEK), is one of a number of local residents spearheading a campaign to address the state of emergency health care in the region. She played an influential role in seeking a solution to the crisis by personally lobbying a local developer to build a hospital. She continues to raise the profile of the campaign by highlighting the issue in the media and speaking to local politicians.

"I have experience of using local NHS services personally and as a nurse. Something must be



done or patients will continue to suffer," she said. "My heart goes out to the nursing staff working locally. We must protect nurses because without them, there will be no NHS."

Stronger than ever



RCN President Cecilia Akrisie Anim looks forward to 2018 with confidence

What a year it's been. Thanks to you the NHS pay cap has been scrapped. But the champagne's on ice. The Chancellor has said that talks on contract reform and what he refers to as "productivity increases" must happen before we actually see any more money in our bank accounts.

We're clear that any future pay award should apply to staff working at all bands and that unsocial hours payments must be retained.

Having seen the way activists and members responded to our Summer of Protest I am confident the Chancellor will know Royal College of Nursing members are not about to back down on issues as important as these.

But pay isn't the only issue we must address. There are so many more, including safe staffing, health and safety, supporting student nurses and inequality in the workplace (see page 7).

We're in a great place to address these challenges. We have new professional and trade union committees to drive our work forward and amazing activists who are willing to stand up for what they believe in.

Whether you're celebrating the forthcoming Christmas season with family and friends or it's business as usual in the next few weeks, I want to say thank you. It's you who protect members and the patients they care for. It's you that makes the RCN so strong.

"It's you who protect members and the patients they care for"

ASK AN ADVISER



Ill while on leave



Can I claim back leave if I'm poorly while on holiday?

For many it's the season to be jolly and take leave from work. But it's also the season for bugs and viruses and a lot of health care staff get ill when they stop working, rest and take their annual leave. Most employers allow staff to claim back their leave if they're sick while on holiday. Check the local sickness policies and the contract of employment.

If members become unwell while on holiday abroad, advise them to seek medical advice promptly and get a sick note from a medical practitioner, in English if possible. It's important to follow the local policy and inform the employer as soon as possible, even if the member is still on holiday. On their return to the UK, they should visit the GP immediately for an updated certificate.

If the employer refuses to reimburse the annual leave or doesn't accept an overseas sick note, this could be an underpayment of wages which should be investigated further. Find out more at www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/underpayment-of-wages

For more information, speak in confidence to an RCN Direct adviser any time between 8.30am and 8.30pm, 365 days per year.

RCN DIRECT
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

View from the frontline



Don't be afraid to get political

I've studied politics in the past and am involved with various political organisations and campaign groups. So when I saw the UK Parliament advertising their student leaders training on the RCN student information officer (SIO) Facebook page, I jumped at the chance to apply.

I was really excited to be accepted and when the day came, I set off for London in the early hours. I was given a tour of the Houses of Parliament before attending several workshops on topics such as how Parliament works, how to use petitions to influence policy and speaking to MPs.

Having attended the training, I now feel I can be more effective when I speak to my MP about the challenges facing nursing staff and I intend to make connections with peers to ask them to support the RCN's work.

I would encourage other members to write about their experiences and concerns and send these to their MPs asking that they take action. Anyone can go along to watch a debate or committee meeting so why not give it a try?

I hope to organise this for students in the Yorkshire & Humber region and would be keen to help any SIO that wanted to do something similar. I'm looking forward to helping other members to make a difference too.

Katharine Youngs, student information officer and student representative on the RCN Trade Union Committee

LEGAL UPDATE



Employees who breastfeed

Does a failure to conduct an appropriate risk assessment for a breastfeeding worker amount to sex discrimination? Potentially yes, according to the Court of Justice of the European Union in *Ramos v Servicio Galego de Saude & Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social*.

An A&E nurse told her employer she was breastfeeding and she wanted her working conditions adjusted because she believed the tasks required of her role could have an adverse impact on her milk and expose her and the baby to health and safety risks.

Her employer disputed that her role posed any such risks but the nurse challenged that with a letter from a senior A&E consultant confirming her work posed physical, chemical, biological and psychosocial risks to lactation.

Sex discrimination claim

As her request for an adjustment to her duties and/or a period of paid leave was declined, she made a claim for sex discrimination. She said her employer had failed to comply with the requirements of EU Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety at work of breastfeeding workers. She also claimed this breached the Equal Treatment Directive.

The Court said there may be evidence of sex discrimination if a worker could prove that a risk assessment hadn't been done or done defectively. However, an employer could still prove no discrimination had occurred if they could establish their risk assessment had been conducted correctly.

Therefore, employers must carry out thorough and specific risk assessments for breastfeeding mothers as a failure to do so could lead to discrimination complaints.

Joanne Galbraith-Marten
RCN Head of Legal
(Employment)



Widen your lens

Becoming an RCN learning rep has given Hamira Ghafoor the perfect opportunity to pursue her passion for raising awareness of race equality

“I wanted to do something to make a difference and I felt I could contribute,” says Hamira, who’s been nursing at Oxford University Hospital NHS Trust for 17 years, and a learning rep since November 2015. “For me, it’s all about inclusion. I wanted to bring people together from different backgrounds and celebrate our successes.”

After joining the trust’s Race Equality Action Group, last year she helped organise an event to mark Eid al-Fitr, which follows the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during daylight hours.

“It was a good opportunity to talk to staff about fasting, why we do it and how an awareness of what happens can help in patient care and supporting colleagues,” says Hamira. “People can feel hesitant to ask questions, but we’re very happy to talk about it. We had great feedback from everyone who attended.” A similar event this year attracted more than double the numbers.

The group is also looking at interview and presentation skills for black and minority ethnic (BME) staff to enhance their promotion prospects. “We’re trying to boost confidence,” says Hamira. “The data tells us that a disproportionate number of BME nurses remain in band 5 posts, not moving upwards. There are many factors that cause the gap, but we’re looking at what we can do to help staff progress.”

Overseas staff

A key aspect of Hamira’s approach has been to join various advisory groups within the trust, including being part of a panel looking at overseas staff recruitment. “Following the first phase of international recruitment more than a decade ago BME staff said they felt unsupported settling in a new country,” she says. “I wanted it to be different this time around.”

Being able to share the experiences of staff is also crucial, Hamira believes. “If we’re saying this is how staff feel, and I have specific examples of how they have been affected – whether positively or negatively – it’s a learning



“I wanted to do something to make a difference”

opportunity for everyone,” she says. “Stories resonate with all of us and staff want to be heard and understood.”

The continued focus has moved issues of equality and diversity much higher up the agenda, Hamira believes. “It used to have the back seat in the room and now it has a seat at the front table,” she says.

For Hamira, it’s about starting the discussion and involving as many others as possible. “When you look at something on your own, you will only ever see it from your angle,” she says. “But when you include people from different backgrounds, you widen your lens and enhance your vision.”

Wendy Irwin, RCN diversity lead, says: “Hamira’s story shows that RCN reps can have a real impact on issues of equality and inclusion in their workplace. We’d like to give all of our reps the knowledge, skills and confidence to do the same.”

The RCN is developing a resource to help you create an equal and inclusive workplace culture. If you would like to help develop this resource, or have positive stories or examples to share, email emily.spencer-rigby@rcn.org.uk

'Let's be a catalyst for change'

After eight years on RCN Council, and four years as Chair, Michael Brown reflects on a job well done

How did you feel when you first became Chair of Council?

I was so proud and felt I had the approval and confidence of the other Council members to steer Council in the right direction.

Have you achieved what you set out to do?

When I became Chair of RCN Council my priority was to increase member engagement and involvement in Council decision-making and I think I've done that. We now hold consultations across the whole of the UK, on a range of issues. And I've made every effort to work with members through social media, on a face-to-face basis and by email.

And your involvement in changing the structure of Council?

It felt like a brave move chairing the work to review Council. It took about 18 months but I had to get it right. Council is now leaner, more transparent and we've taken away some of the bureaucracy that was there before. But the work isn't over yet – we must continue to evolve and evaluate.

How do you feel about this summer's Scrap the Cap campaign?

I was so impressed by the level of support I saw. We can only achieve in this kind of work if people get behind you. Our resolute campaigning is now moving on as we demand the pay gap is closed. It's essential that the NHS pay review body acts independently for the future of nursing to be assured.

What advice would you give to the next Chair of Council?

Listen to what members tell you and remain open to challenge. Work collaboratively with the new committees, don't take on too much and remember you're not alone. You have Council and 435,000 members behind you.

How would you like to see the RCN developing over the next decade?

We must re-establish ourselves as the voice of nursing, setting the agenda, not just following it. We must be the catalyst for change. It's important for the new professional and trade



union committees to be strong and stay ahead of the game.

Any message for activists who might be thinking of standing for Council?

If you're ready, put your hand up, but take some time to research the role first. Remember the knowledge and skills you'll develop if elected are second to none and you'll have support from staff with a great knowledge of union and nursing policies. Working on Council will really open your eyes to what's happening in nursing, not just in the UK, but internationally.

What's next?

Although I'm standing down from my high-profile RCN roles on 31 December, I'll continue to support members locally. My role as nursing workforce manager will keep me very busy, but I'll have time to reflect and enjoy being at home every night.

Michael was elected to RCN Council in 2009 and will step down at the end of the year. He's been Chair of the Scotland Board since 2010 and Chair of RCN Council since 2013 but continues in his role as a nursing workforce manager at NHS Ayrshire and Arran. He's also an RCN steward and safety representative.

NOTICEBOARD

Agency support

A new RCN toolkit aims to improve working conditions for agency nursing staff. It suggests ways agencies and organisations that employ temporary staff can provide a healthy and safe working environment and provides advice directly to agency nurses on how they can meet their responsibilities to practise safely.

The toolkit was developed in partnership with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), following discussions with employment agencies and agency nursing staff.

RCN health and safety lead Kim Sunley said this support is important. "Agency nurses are well trained and often have many decades of service. In recent years they've played an increasingly important role in supporting the NHS, particularly in times of increased demand but can be deployed at very short notice to fill gaps in rotas."

She added: "Agency nursing staff make a huge contribution to the care and safety of patients, but they're often not afforded the same respect as directly employed staff and we hope this new publication will help."

The toolkit can also support compliance with standards and legal requirements including the REC code of professional practice.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/rcn-agency-toolkit>

Tools of the trade



Maternity Action says one in every 20 mothers is made redundant during pregnancy, maternity leave or upon their return to work, and many of these redundancies are unfair or discriminatory. Visit <http://tiny.cc/maternityaction>

A new Health and Safety Executive campaign is encouraging employers to protect their workers' health particularly in the areas of work-related stress, lung diseases and musculoskeletal disorders. Visit www.hse.gov.uk/gohomehealthy/

A Department of Health consultation on reforming the regulation of all nine UK health care professions, including the NMC, could see the number of health care regulators reduced to three. Take part in an online survey at <http://tiny.cc/regulationreform>

NHS Employers has produced top tips to help organisations maximise flexible arrangements. Download a poster from <http://tiny.cc/flextoptips>. Visit <http://tiny.cc/nhsemployersflexworking> for more information on flexible working.

Don't miss the Congress deadlines

Time is running out for you to make next year's Congress the best yet

Having an item you've suggested debated at Congress is a chance to highlight the issues important to you, but you've only got until **2 January** to submit your idea. Suggestions can come from RCN boards, branches, forums or representative committee members. Email congressagenda@rcn.org.uk if you're not sure who to contact. Tell us what you want debated at www.rcn.org.uk/congress/agenda/submit-an-agenda-item

Anyone who's a member of an RCN forum, board, branch, network or group can submit a proposal

for a fringe event but you need to get your idea to the RCN by **2 January**. There are many different events at Congress, so make sure you highlight exactly what your fringe event is all about. There are some top tips for submitting your proposal at www.rcn.org.uk/congress. Tell us about your idea at www.rcn.org.uk/congress/about/submit-a-congress-fringe-event

Register for Congress 2018 now and you'll receive a 20% discount code for Flybe flights to and from Belfast booked before **31 December**.

RCN Congress takes place between 12 and 16 May 2018 at the Belfast Waterfront Arena. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress

Happy Christmas from the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN official Christmas card 2017.
Picture by Rachael Fessey.

