

Activate

Vol 11 No 6 February 2017

News, views and support for RCN activists



MPs hear true impact of pay restraint

The RCN is urging reps to keep the pressure on politicians, following the recent parliamentary debate on nursing pay

MPs drew on members' stories to highlight the financial impact of the 1% cap on individual nurses, as well as on recruitment and retention.

Josie Irwin, RCN Head of Employment Relations, said: "The pay review body was writing its report at the very time that MPs were agreeing with us about the real hardship facing nursing staff. It will still be another few weeks before the report is put before MPs and we mustn't let them forget their comments." The RCN insists that pay should not be cut to deal with a crisis that nursing staff didn't create and cutting nursing pay will make the crisis worse. "MPs must look at the impact that pay restraint is

having on the economy. Every pound that's not in a nurse's pocket isn't being spent in local shops and services," said Josie.

While there was general cross-party consensus among those attending the debate for the Government to end pay restraint, crucially Government minister Philip Dunne didn't agree, citing 'extraordinary economic circumstances'. "The job isn't done yet," added Josie. "Activists can help by encouraging members to keep contacting their MPs, keeping the story in the local news and getting active on Facebook and Twitter."

In September, the RCN urged the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB), which advises the Government on NHS staff pay, to recommend a meaningful pay rise for NHS workers for 2017-18 in line with the retail prices index. The PRB is expected to submit its report to ministers by the end of February.

Nominate now

Time is running out to make your nomination for this year's RCN Award of Merit. If you know someone who has dedicated their time and energy to helping RCN members, you can nominate them for this special award. Visit <http://tiny.cc/awardofmerit> before 1 March.

You can also nominate someone for this year's RCN representatives of the year awards. If you know an RCN rep who has made a real difference to members in the workplace, nominate them for an award by writing just a few sentences to suggest why they should be considered. The deadline for submissions is 28 February. Visit <http://tiny.cc/rcnreprofttheyear>

The awards ceremony takes place on 13 May at the opening of RCN Congress at the Arena and Convention Centre in Liverpool.

RCN tackles discrimination

An equality and inclusion strategy has been agreed by RCN Council that puts these important issues at the centre of the College's work. It also looks at ways to empower members to have more influence and control in their workplaces.

The strategy recognises the need to strengthen the continuing learning and development provided to accredited representatives on a range of equality and inclusion issues.

"This is a really important way for the RCN to improve support for members and to help them find solutions to unlawful discrimination and forms of disadvantage in the workplace," said Wendy Irwin, RCN Diversity and Equalities Co-ordinator.

"All members need to be aware of the importance of promoting inclusion and tackling discrimination and inequality," Wendy added.

Members who haven't previously thought about becoming a rep are now being encouraged to consider other forms of activism that cover these issues.

Persistent disadvantage and discrimination can have a big impact on life chances and outcomes for different groups. This latest RCN work

will provide a framework that will protect and establish fundamental equality in terms of worth, rights, inclusion and dignity.

"This will help us generate evidence that can be used to challenge employers, service providers and policy-makers to initiate positive change," said Wendy. "And it will ensure nursing staff can work in environments that are fully inclusive and are free from unlawful discrimination."

For more information, please email wendy.irwin@rcn.org.uk



MPs to debate attacks on NHS staff



Violence against NHS staff will be debated in Parliament on 27 February. This follows a radio campaign that encouraged members of the public to sign a petition to make it a specific criminal offence to attack any member of NHS medical staff in England.

The RCN is supporting the campaign launched on LBC radio, and will provide case studies and briefings for the debate.

The campaign calls for parity with the police because for 20 years it has been a specific offence to attack a police officer conducting their duties. Scotland also has specific legislation in this area. However, the campaign only relates to wilful attacks and not those committed by patients who, because of their condition, are not aware of their actions.

Kim Sunley, RCN Senior Employment Relations Adviser, said: "This will be an important debate and a chance to highlight the unacceptable risks faced by RCN members and other health care workers. These assaults cost the NHS more than £60 million a year. This money should be spent on resolving the factors that contribute to violence in the first place."

Read more about the LBC campaign *Guard our Emergency Medical Services* at <http://tiny.cc/lbccampaign>

Read *Assault Figures Show Sharp Rise* at <http://tiny.cc/violence>

If you, or a member you know, would be willing to share your experiences of violence in the workplace, email kim.sunley@rcn.org.uk

It's not too late to shape the debate

NMC decision



The RCN Agenda Committee is meeting this month to discuss submissions received for debates to take place at this year's RCN Congress. But there is still time to put forward ideas for emergency agenda items. These must be on an issue or topic that has arisen since the closing date for agenda items on 11 January.

“Keep an eye out for political announcements or new policy affecting nursing or health care in the run-up to Congress,” said Stuart McKenzie, Chair of RCN Congress. “Having an item debated at Congress is a great opportunity to highlight important issues and influence the RCN's work.”

Suggestions for potential emergency agenda items can be submitted by RCN boards, branches, forums or representative committee members by completing a form available on the RCN website. The closing date for submissions

is Wednesday 17 May. If you're unsure who your board or committee members are, email congressagenda@rcn.org.uk

Tips on submitting an emergency agenda item that will engage delegates are available on the RCN website.

RCN Congress takes place between Saturday 13 and Wednesday 17 May at Liverpool Arena and Convention Centre. Bookings open on 1 March. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress

50th anniversary

Did you attend Congress between 1967 and 1977? The RCN is celebrating 50 years of Congress this year and would like to hear from you if you have memories you would like to share. Email congressbulletin@rcn.org.uk

The RCN has welcomed the Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC) decision to regulate nursing associates. The College has campaigned for the regulation of health care support workers to increase protection for people receiving care and to ensure that standards are consistent. “The nursing associate role is an opportunity to provide support to nurses and improve care. But it's vital that despite the financial pressures, NHS trusts do not replace registered nurses with nursing associates to save on costs,” said Janet Davies, RCN General Secretary. The RCN is calling on the Government to fund the NMC to undertake this new work.

Value of reps

Work is continuing on the RCN's *Value of Reps* project. The next steps will be discussed with the RCN's UK representative committees in the next month, before feedback is sought from members and staff from all over the UK. It is hoped that some initiatives will begin later this year.

Student crisis: 10,000 fewer applicants



The fall in the number of students studying nursing puts the future of the profession in jeopardy, the RCN has warned. The comments

came as new figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) showed that nearly 10,000 fewer people have chosen to study nursing in England compared to last year.

Janet Davies, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, said: “We warned the Government the removal of student funding would see a sharp drop in nursing applications. These figures confirm our worst fears.

“Fewer EU nurses are coming to work in the UK following the Brexit vote, and by 2020 nearly half the workforce will be eligible for retirement.”

The RCN is calling on the Government to take immediate action to encourage more applicants by reinstating student funding and investing in student education.

Pension films

Activists can use two new films about the NHS pension to help show members the benefits of the scheme. They cover the advantages of being in the NHS scheme (www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Pensions/799.aspx) and issues members should take into account if they are considering opting out (www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Pensions/4195.aspx).

Protecting the NHS



There are many reasons to be positive, but there's more work to do, says Janet Davies, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary

Last month I joined members in Parliament to lobby MPs ahead of the debate on nursing pay. Listening to members sharing their stories, and those of colleagues, illustrated how the cap on pay is putting them under pressure. It was fabulous and so encouraging to see so many new RCN faces at the lobby and it was a privilege to be with them and their infectious energy.

I was also really pleased to see that members who were unable to attend the lobby felt empowered to tweet their stories online, highlighting the power of social media.

I know meeting politicians and disclosing personal circumstances isn't easy but these powerful personal stories made a huge difference as they were recounted and quoted by MPs in the debate.

The economy is struggling and there is still much uncertainty surrounding the Government's Brexit plans, so it may seem difficult to be positive right now. But because of your hard work we have made nursing pay an issue that cannot and must not be ignored. Is the Government listening? Not judging from its response to the debate. But we will keep on fighting. Let's force MPs to address nursing pay and the 24,000 vacancies – because the NHS, which they all say they want to protect, is at serious risk.

"We have made nursing pay an issue that cannot be ignored"

ASK AN ADVISER



Getting to work



What if I can't get to work due to bad weather or travel disruption?

Bad weather conditions and industrial action taking place on public transport can bring challenges for members struggling to get to their place of work. However, there's no legal requirement for employers to pay staff who are unable to get to work due to poor weather or travel disruption.

Members should be advised to check their local policy. It's generally the case that staff will be expected to take annual leave or make up the time at a later date. Employers should always discuss the situation with their staff before making any deduction to their pay.

If members can't get to work on time they should tell their employer as soon as possible. The employer should be reasonable and realistic. They should not pressurise members into taking risks in poor weather.

Likewise, members shouldn't feel obligated to take risks to get to work in obviously dangerous conditions. Good communication and timely updates are the key to avoiding any future disputes.

Get help with workplace problems, and more, at www.rcn.org.uk/advice

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

View from the frontline



Spreading the RCN word

Concerns about the low numbers of RCN reps in my region has led to a push to raise awareness of the RCN's role and get more activists on board. In the last two years we've recruited 22 new RCN reps at my trust – we only had a handful here before so this is a great step forward. Of course, we now have to find the time and resources to mentor and supervise these new activists. But if we make sure their talents are harnessed, members will benefit so much.

The work is continuing. Each branch now runs two sessions every month to highlight what we do. It's a chance to build on the way members got involved with our recent successful pay campaign. Members wanted more face-to-face contact so we have to make sure we see as many people as possible. We visit all areas of the trust at different times of day, including during the night shift, and we wear shirts emblazoned with the RCN logo so we're easily recognisable.

I'm proud of what we've achieved. Nursing staff are now so much more aware of what the RCN does for members. We've changed people's perceptions too. People will often only come to us when they're in trouble but the RCN is about much more than that. We're now seen not just as a union, but also a professional body that supports nursing staff in a range of ways throughout their career.

David McKerr, RCN steward and safety representative at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

LEGAL UPDATE



Permanent injury benefit



The RCN has secured a landmark victory at the Court of Appeal regarding the correct interpretation of the permanent injury benefit (PIB) regulations in *NHS Business Services Authority v Mrs Karen Young*.

In 2010, Mrs Young was attending a patient when she was injured.

Following the injury the member suffered such severe ongoing back pain that she was unable to return to work and her employment was terminated on the grounds of ill-health. An MRI scan later revealed an underlying degenerative spine condition which, up until she was injured at work, had been asymptomatic. The member was unaware of her condition.

The member applied for PIB under the NHS Injury Benefit Scheme. Unfortunately, her application was refused and despite appealing and complaining to the Pensions Ombudsman she was denied these benefits due to the underlying condition.

Interpretation

The Court of Appeal accepted that there had been an incorrect interpretation of the PIB regulations. It ruled that the words "by reason of" mean that the injury need only be a cause of the permanent loss of earning ability, as opposed to the cause.

The effect of this judgment is that many applicants for PIB may have been wrongly refused such benefits in the past and may now be able to challenge this. Many individuals who are currently having their applications determined may now be granted these benefits, whereas previously they would have been refused.

If you know anyone that this has happened to, please advise them to contact RCN Direct as soon as possible for further advice.

**Kate Matravers
RCN Legal Officer**

Money worries

Often misunderstood or unrecognised, the effects of financial abuse can be potentially devastating for individuals, both emotionally and practically. But as Lynne Pearce explains, the RCN can help

“It’s one of the lesser known forms of domestic abuse,” says RCN Senior Welfare Adviser Claire Cannings. “And it can happen to anyone, even the most senior members of staff.”

Of around 25 new referrals to the RCN’s Welfare Service each week, she estimates that four or five people will not be in control of their money, with an abusive partner or family member taking charge.

“Whether or not it’s accompanied by aggression or violence, it can leave someone feeling isolated, lacking in confidence and trapped,” explains Claire. “They may also be facing financial difficulties – even at risk of losing their home – because they don’t have full control over finances.”

Examples of financial abuse include:

- making someone hand over their wages
- insisting they take out credit
- demanding they account for every penny spent
- controlling a bank account
- running up debts in their name
- not contributing to household expenses, causing financial difficulty for the individual.

As an RCN rep, what can you do if you suspect this is happening? Look for the tell-tale signs, advises Claire. “Inexplicably not having money for bills and being clearly worried about cash could raise alarm bells,” she says. “Especially if that’s coupled with a new relationship or an adult child has returned home.”

Often people are embarrassed, not wanting to admit someone close to them is taking advantage. “Gently encourage them to seek advice from a third party,” says Claire. “And remember we’re there to support you too. So if you have concerns and don’t know what to do, talk to us first.”



Ann’s story

For RCN member, Ann*, financial abuse was one aspect of an abusive relationship. Throughout their marriage of 30 years, her husband had taken complete charge of money, including having her wages paid into a joint account. “What he was doing wasn’t obvious,” says Ann. “I was very naïve and I went along with what he said because I thought he knew best.”

Before she bought anything, Ann had to ask his permission. He also opened many other accounts with different banks, coercing Ann to sign the paperwork. While he never revealed how much he earned, he insisted they were struggling financially – when in reality the reverse was true.

As a result, Ann had no idea how much it cost to run a home, believing she wouldn’t be able to live on her wages after their divorce. “So I was surprised I still had money left after paying the bills each month,” she says. “That was when I realised how much he had been secreting money away. Now I don’t feel guilty about spending money on myself. It’s about time.”

More information

RCN resources on domestic abuse: <http://tiny.cc/domesticabuse>

*Ann’s name has been changed to protect her identity.

Revalidation: one year on



Keeping in contact with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is central to ensuring a smooth revalidation process. RCN Principal Legal Officer Roz Hooper says there are a number of ways reps can help members avoid inadvertently lapsing from the register

What's the background?

All registrants must submit their application for revalidation online, so it's essential they have an NMC online account. Nurses and midwives have to revalidate every three years to renew their registration.

Why are email addresses important?

The way the NMC writes to registrants has changed and they now treat email addresses as registered addresses. All but the most basic communications are sent by email, not by post. There are more than 30,000 individuals who are not receiving emails from the NMC and unsurprisingly there's a correlation between those who lapse and those who haven't registered an email address on the NMC website.

Where can you find out more?

Read the RCN advice at www.rcn.org.uk/revalidation or visit the NMC website: <http://revalidation.nmc.org.uk>

Why are NMC emails so important?

Email is used to remind registrants to pay their fees and revalidate. Additional emails are sent to registrants who haven't opened their emails. If members habitually delete emails from the NMC without reading them, and they seem to be getting more of them, this could be because the NMC is trying to alert them about something important.

How can reps help?

Fear of technology is an issue. Please show those who haven't yet registered or provided their email address how easy it is to do. Explain how they can set up email on their smartphone as they're more likely to see messages this way. It's the registrant's responsibility to check that their email address will work. So for those who provide their work email address, there's a risk of emails getting caught in spam filters. Reps can get in touch with work IT departments to make sure they know to class the NMC as a "safe sender".

If members lapse, how long does it take to re-register?

Members can reassure their employers that they should be back on the register quickly. Nurses who submit all the documentation correctly are being re-registered within about two weeks at the moment, although lapsing from the register can take between two and six weeks to correct.

Can members work if they lapse?

Not as a nurse. Members should request different duties until they are re-registered. It's a criminal offence to work as a nurse when you've lapsed from the NMC register and the NMC treats this very seriously if it is done knowingly. However, lapsing shouldn't be used as an excuse for employers to suspend or dismiss members.

Is this a big problem?

Not as much as we thought it would be – the figures for renewing before revalidation was introduced remain unaltered, with 95% of those who are due to revalidate doing so. But even if only a few registrants accidentally lapse, the personal implications for them could be huge.

NOTICEBOARD

Latest publications

Places of detention

There are increasing numbers of people in criminal justice settings who have multiple and complex health care needs. Sometimes these people are treated in NHS settings outside prison or police custody. The RCN's guidance is aimed at nursing staff working in NHS settings. It provides support and advice on providing the best care to this group of patients. Download *Supporting Nursing Staff: Caring for Patients From Places of Detention* from the RCN website.

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005856>

Cancer nursing

The *RCN Career and Education Framework for Cancer Nursing for UK Nursing Staff* is the first to incorporate cancer-specific nursing outcomes. The framework and outcomes are intended to be used as part of professional, education and workforce development to support improvements in the delivery of high quality care to people affected by cancer.

The publication includes a summary of the policy background for the development of the framework and key definitions relating to the delivery of cancer care.

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005718>

Tools of the trade



One in four workers report money worries have affected their ability to do their job. One in 10 say they have found it hard to concentrate and make decisions at work because of money worries, according to a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Read more at <http://tiny.cc/moneyworries>

The latest edition of the Labour Research Department's key source of information on recent employment law cases is now available. It contains summaries and updates of important cases. Read *Case Law at Work* at

<http://tiny.cc/caselawatwork>. Login details are available at <http://tiny.cc/repshub>

The national minimum wage and national living wage rates change from April. Download the Acas advisory booklet on pay systems from www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1902

A new report published by the TUC, *Public Sector Pay Restraint in England*, shows that pay for public sector workers is predicted to fall by 2020. For more information and to download the report, visit <http://tiny.cc/tucreport>

Quiz helps to recruit reps

The RCN has developed a new resource to help recruit reps in the independent sector.

By answering the simple questions in the quiz, nursing staff can find out what rep role best suits them. Although it is aimed at nursing staff working in the independent sector, it can be used in any area.

"It's just a bit of fun but is already proving really popular and is a great way to start conversations," said Irene Murray, RCN Employment Relations Adviser. "When you're next out and about why not share it with members and non-members and then encourage them to get in touch with their local office to have a chat about the results."



Activists can email publications@rcn.org.uk quoting publication number 005 728 to order a copy.

Learners impressed by reps' pathway

The latest evaluation of the RCN reps' learning and development pathway has shown that learners continue to rate their experience highly.

Recent changes to assessment and the portfolio have made a real difference, according to the annual feedback. Fewer reps working on the foundation module now find completing a portfolio challenging. Of those who say they do,



almost all still believe it is a valuable activity that prepares them for practice.

Most reps are happy with the support they receive from the RCN once they're in their role, but the College has identified this as an area where improvements could be made.

Data was taken from evaluations completed by learners attending the foundation and development modules in 2016 across all four countries.