

Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists



Rocky road ahead

As 2017 gets underway the RCN is focused on standing up for members in the face of uncertainty, huge demand and mounting winter pressures

Since the start of the year the NHS has been hitting the headlines across the UK, with many nurses and other clinical staff reporting serious concerns over the quality of care they can provide. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn quoted the RCN in an attack on the Government during Prime Minister's Questions earlier this month. "The Royal College of Nursing has said that NHS conditions are the worst ever," he said.

RCN Head of Employment Relations Josie Irwin said it is time for nursing staff to speak out. "In this uncertain post-Brexit world, it's more important than ever to voice any concerns, both about possible harm to patients and working conditions that inevitably link with quality of care. The RCN will continue to

speak out nationally and support our reps to help members get their concerns heard," she said.

The pressures on staff this year seem likely to match those of 2016, which will be remembered for unpredicted political and economic events with far-reaching impact. The working lives of nursing staff in the UK became more stressful than ever, even dangerous for some, as a consequence of staff shortages and an increasingly bullying culture in some organisations. Figures from NHS Protect released last month showed that attacks on NHS staff in England had risen sharply, with more than 70,500 assaults reported.

Some of the RCN's priorities for 2017 are fair pay for nursing staff, including those outside the NHS, making sure you have a safe working environment, and protecting members from discrimination and unfair practices. "We are preparing for uncertainty and we will be here for you whatever 2017 may bring," added Josie.

Investment needed

More nurses are the key to better mental health services, the RCN has said. The Prime Minister has announced that mental health first aid training for secondary school teachers will be introduced, alongside an extra £15 million for community care services. However, the RCN believes real advances will rely on the Government addressing NHS staffing problems to ensure patients get the care they deserve.

Janet Davies, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, said: “The Prime Minister is right to draw attention to mental health – for far too long this area has not been regarded as important as physical health.” However, she added: “If the Government wants to improve child mental health, there needs to be significant investment in school nurses and health visitors.” Since 2010, the number of school nurses has dropped by 10% and more than 4,000 new health visitor roles have been cut.

‘The future of nursing is at stake’

The RCN has attacked the Government for its reliance on the dedication and goodwill of NHS staff who are at breaking point this winter. RCN



members from across the UK have said they have serious concerns about the quality of the care nursing staff can provide. Many say these are the worst conditions they have ever experienced.

Janet Davies, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, said: “We do not say we need more staff, funding and resources as a matter of routine. We are saying the health and wellbeing of the nation needs an NHS which is fit for purpose.”

There are already 24,000 vacant nursing posts in the country and the situation is expected to worsen. The RCN has called on the Government to reinstate student funding (see below) and get rid of the pay cap.

Janet added: “We need to have enough nurses with the right skills, in the right places – in hospitals, in people’s homes, in schools and in care homes. The future of nursing is at stake.”

‘Broken and distressed’

“Today I ran our major treatment area. Patients were waiting more than 12 hours for beds. My staff were broken and distressed. By the end of the day you could see their care-worn, exhausted faces, feeling like they’ve failed. But really it’s the Government that has failed. Tonight I’ve come home and I’ve sat and cried. Our compassion doesn’t have a limit but our energy and our ability to maintain our care does.” **RCN member**

Student numbers plummet following funding change

Nursing degree applications have fallen by 20% since the Westminster Government replaced bursaries with student loans, according to *The Times*. The drop in applications for nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects is twice that of other courses.

The RCN says the Government has gambled with the future of the nursing workforce, noting that when the 2017 student intake graduates in 2020, there will be fewer nurses.

Research from the Institute of Employment Studies has shown the effects of Brexit, coupled with a rising

population of people over the age of 85, mean there are already too few nurses to meet the demands placed on the NHS.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Janet Davies said: “We are in the midst of a workforce crisis with not enough nurses being trained domestically and an over-reliance on overseas recruitment. This is further exacerbated by Brexit and the uncertainty around the right for EU nurses to remain in the UK.”

Keep up to date with the bursary campaign at www.rcn.org.uk/studentbursaries

Welsh bursary

“The NHS bursary for student nurses will be retained in Wales for 2017/18. Tina Donnelly, Director, RCN Wales, said: “The RCN fully supports funding nursing education and we were pleased with the student nurse funding debate which took place in the Senedd this year.” The RCN will continue to provide evidence to the National Assembly for Wales to support retaining funding for nursing and midwifery education in Wales. The RCN is observing the variation in nursing student recruitment across the four countries of the UK.

Help for members affected by domestic abuse



The RCN has launched a new resource to help reps understand what support is available for anyone who has been subject to domestic abuse. It also includes information on negotiating workplace policies and practices to support members.

A report published at the end of last year by the Cavell Trust found that nursing professionals are three times more likely than the average person to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year.

“This is an issue that can affect nursing staff professionally and personally, but the more we

discuss it, the more we can understand about it, and the better equipped we are to provide support and care for those affected,” said Helen Donovan, RCN Professional Lead for Public Health.

Research has shown that health and domestic abuse are inextricably linked and abuse has a profound and long-term impact on physical and mental health.

The RCN Counselling Service has reported that many members face significant issues as a result of domestic abuse, and the financial impact on individuals can be very challenging. Reps can remind members that they can get free, confidential support and assistance to help deal with emotional issues, including domestic violence. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/domestic-violence-and-abuse

The facts

- **1 in 3 women** globally are directly affected by domestic abuse
- **1 in 6 men** will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime
- **1 in 5 children** have been exposed to domestic abuse

Nursing pay to be debated in Parliament

Congratulations to activists who helped a petition urging the Government to scrap an NHS pay cap of 1% reach 100,000 signatures. A debate will take place in the House of Commons on Monday 30 January.

Activists are asked to encourage their MPs to attend. RCN materials promoting the debate are available to download from the website.

The online petition, started by RCN member Danielle Tiplady, argued that staff on Agenda for Change contracts have experienced harsh pay restraint since 2010 and lost more than 14% of their pay in real terms.

Danielle said: “100,000 signatures is a huge achievement and sends a strong message to the



Government that it's time for change. Nursing staff deserve a pay award that reflects our knowledge, skill and dedication. Colleagues are struggling to pay bills and even turning away from the profession, and it's time Parliament debated why.”

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/nursingcounts for the latest information.

Nursing associates

The RCN is running a Twitter chat this week to give members the opportunity to discuss the impact nursing associates will have on nursing. It takes place on Wednesday 25 January between 6pm and 7pm on the hashtag **#RCNchat**. If members approach you with questions about nursing associates activists are encouraged to show them the new online question and answer resource the RCN has published on its website. Visit tiny.cc/nursingassociates

Lone working

A new RCN resource has been developed to promote the importance of personal safety for lone working nurses. It includes checklists for safety reps and line managers to use. A leaflet to hand out at events is also available from RCN publications. It contains tips for members on keeping safe when visiting patients at home. Download *Personal Safety When Working Alone* from www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005716

New handbook

An interactive version of the Agenda for Change handbook is now available. The handbook is amended whenever new agreements are reached in the NHS Staff Council. These amendments are published in numbered pay and conditions circulars setting out details of the changes, including the effective dates of changes to pay and conditions. Visit www.nhsemployers.org/tchandbook

Something for everyone



Attending Congress will help you be a better nurse, says BJ Waltho, Vice Chair of RCN Congress

Going to Congress reminds you why you started nursing in the first place. People are quick to knock the profession but at Congress we stand together and we are strong. When I see younger members getting involved, with the same passion and vision that I had at their age, I feel reassured that the future of nursing is in safe hands.

I've watched and got involved in many debates over the years. The ones I proposed hold a special place in my heart but I've also learnt not to judge debates just based on the headlines. You need to be there. You need to get involved. Although you may not know much about a subject, it doesn't mean that it won't be interesting or important for you. I wasn't instantly struck by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) debate in 2014. It hadn't been on my radar, but I was fascinated by the issues raised.

I'm asking *Activate* readers to go out of their way to encourage their colleagues to attend. So many members think Congress is just for activists, but it's not. It's for all members and whatever their role or experience they will learn something that will help them in their workplace. It's a unique opportunity to get an insight into such a wide range of nursing issues and nursing roles. But they must be warned, once they go, if they're anything like me, they'll want to go again, and again, and again.

www.rcn.org.uk/congress



“At Congress we stand together and we are strong”

ASK AN ADVISER



Gifts from patients



Should a member ever accept a gift from a patient?

If a member is a nurse or midwife, they should read section 21 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council code, which states that all but the most trivial gifts, favours or hospitality should be refused. This is because accepting them could be perceived as an attempt to gain preferential treatment.

Any member offered a gift from a patient (including a bequest in a will) should also read their local policy. The policy may specify a threshold amount for acceptance, or it might state that all gifts should be refused. The member may be required to declare even the offer of a gift. It can be difficult to refuse a well-meant gift from a patient. Members can seek support from their manager who may be able to help them politely decline the gift.

If a nurse or midwife member has unknowingly been left a bequest in a will, they may not be in contravention of the NMC code by accepting it, but there have been occasions when nurses have been asked to justify their position. Read more at www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/gifts-and-wills

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



Following my dreams

At the age of 17 I knew I wanted to be a nurse. It was 1966 and I was expected to pursue an academic career, but even at that young age, I knew what I wanted and I was determined to follow my dreams.

I absolutely loved being a nurse and it wasn't long before I became active. In 1969 I got involved with the RCN's *Raise the Roof* campaign and took part in marches to defend our salaries. As I gained more experience it became clear that I was destined to work with the RCN. As an in-service training sister I was used to teaching health and safety and welfare at work and after speaking to my local branch secretary I found myself agreeing to use these skills as a steward, safety rep and later as a professional facilitator.

In the 50 years since starting my nursing career, I've seen so many changes. The RCN has embraced nursing students and I now see their valuable input to RCN Council. But the roles of all nursing staff have changed. The voice of nursing is getting louder and we are far more willing to challenge unfairness now. We have become more autonomous and we take a far more holistic approach to caring for our patients.

I've had half a century working as a nurse, an activist and a member of RCN staff. In 1966 I just wanted to make a difference and influence. I think I've done that.

Jennifer Doohan
RCN Professional Development Officer

LEGAL UPDATE



Rest breaks



Since the Working Time Regulations were introduced in 1998, a worker has been able to complain to an employment tribunal that their employer has refused to allow them to take their rightful rest breaks and annual leave.

But is the right to a rest break only triggered if the worker has actually made a request for the break,

which has then been refused by the employer?

In cases in 2008 and 2012, the courts held that the worker has to have made the request. But should employers be more proactive in ensuring compliance with this critical health and safety issue, and what if the system of work simply doesn't allow for rest periods?

Appeals decision

Now in an important judgment in *Grange v Abellio London Ltd (2016)*, the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) has held that the earlier decisions were wrong.

An employee had been working an 8.5-hour shift, with a 30-minute break, until 2012, when he was told by his employer to work an eight-hour shift, without a break, and finish work 30 minutes earlier.

In 2014 he raised a grievance and brought a claim for a breach of Regulation 12 on rest breaks. The tribunal rejected his claim because he hadn't requested the breaks before 2014. The EAT overturned the decision and held that the employer has an obligation to allow the entitlement to a rest break.

An employer must allow employees to take their 20-minute rest break if the working day is longer than six hours. It is up to the employee to then take them.

Read *A Shift in the Right Direction* at tiny.cc/rightdirection

Chris Cox
RCN Director of Membership Relations

Caring for you

Just as employers must create healthy workplaces for nursing staff, it's important that we all consider factors that have an impact on our own health

Self-care is the power we all hold as individuals to influence our level of wellbeing. Good self-care is the foundation on which nursing staff are able to interact positively with family, friends or colleagues, and deliver safe and compassionate care to their patients.

Activists have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging members to take care of themselves so that they are able to take care of others. It's never your role to counsel members, even if you have a professional qualification. You're there to signpost members to expert services such as RCN counselling, occupational health services or their GP.

RCN campaign

The RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign supports health care professionals to develop, implement and maintain self-care strategies. Already, members can access a set of resources to support their self-care and some have attended the successful *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* workshops.

The project was triggered by a road accident and the bereavement support session that followed, facilitated by the RCN's counselling service. "A member of my group was involved in fatal road accident. At the time she was suffering from a common ailment and probably should have taken sick leave. However, she felt the need to go to work and tragically died on her way," explains Rachel Wood, RCN Professional Learning and Development Facilitator. "The outcome of the support session was to realise the importance of self-care and the *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* project was started as a legacy to her life. As the group developed we made a link to, and now work in partnership with, the *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign."

RCN steward Liz Jeramiah leads study days on self-care. She says the benefits cannot be overstated. "When you look after yourself, you're at the centre of your universe. You can then turn a full 360 degrees and appreciate the beauty of all that surrounds you. When you



"It's never your role to counsel members"

place yourself on the periphery, only looking in, you can only see what is directly in front of you," she says.

Read more about the RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign at tiny.cc/healthyworkplace

What's your role?

- Inform and educate members about the importance of self-care.
- Signpost members to the campaign resources on the RCN website so they can complete a self-assessment and plan ways of improving their self-care.
- Signpost members to RCN resources if they feel they need help to take care of themselves.
- Organise events in your workplace or branch to raise the profile of self-care.
- Tell members what happens when nursing staff neglect self-care. Ask them to consider the impact on themselves, their colleagues and their patients.

New year, new you

It's a new year and RCN Head of Employment Relations Josie Irwin thinks that our new year's resolutions should get us thinking about what we really want out of life

So many of us want a better work-life balance, fair pay and safe staffing levels. Wouldn't it be great if not just you, but all nursing staff benefitted from safer working conditions? Whatever your contribution is, it all counts. There's so much to be gained from joining forces with other members so let's make 2017 the year the voice of nursing gets so much louder.



Is your workplace healthy?

Healthy workplaces offer fair pay and rewards and have high quality employment practices and procedures which promote a good work-life balance.

How can you help?

- Find out more and tell members about the RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign.
- Use the campaign website to initiate discussion at your branch meeting.
- Use the RCN's campaign toolkit to carry out a health check of your organisation and identify areas for improvement.

tiny.cc/healthyworkplace

Do you think nursing staff are paid fairly?

Continuing low pay for nursing staff in the independent sector is a huge challenge. The RCN is concerned that low pay and the 1% cap on pay increases for NHS staff are having a huge impact on the morale and finances of members. More nursing staff than ever are considering their future in the profession.

How can you help?

- Download and share the RCN poster promoting fair pay in every workplace. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/nursingcounts/independent-sector
- Promote the RCN's work demanding an end to the pay restraint imposed on NHS staff. Read more on page 3.
- If your organisation doesn't yet recognise the RCN, start a conversation promoting the many mutual benefits of recognition in the workplace.
- Consider the impact years of pay restraint has had on you. Share your story and encourage other members to do so too. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/nursingcounts/share-your-story

www.rcn.org.uk/nursingcounts

Can you be a more active RCN activist?

Activists are the lifeblood of the RCN. It's clear that members rely on you, but everyone is so busy. We need more activists and the RCN needs to raise its profile and show members that they are the union. By spreading the RCN message you can help more members get active.

How can you help?

- Vote in or stand for an RCN election or put yourself forward for an RCN appointment.
- Attend a branch meeting or submit an agenda item to your branch.
- If you've never attended before, go to Congress. If you've never spoken at Congress before, get on that stage.
- Vote in the AGM.
- Write a letter to *Nursing Standard* or *RCN Bulletin* or join the discussion on the RCN's Facebook page.
- Encourage other nursing staff to do all these things too when you talk to them about the benefits of being an RCN member.

www.rcn.org.uk/reprs-hub

NOTICEBOARD

New publications

Raising concerns

The RCN has published new guidance to help members raise concerns in the workplace. As activists you may feel confident in speaking out but this document is useful to share with members wherever they work and whether they wish to raise a concern as an individual or as part of a group.

It explains that their concern must be based on a reasonable belief which they can justify – but they don't need hard evidence that wrongdoing is happening or something has taken place or is likely to happen in the future.

Integration toolkit

A new toolkit has been developed to support reps and senior nurses working in strategic decision-making roles or forums around integrated care. It's ideal for reps with a role in shaping integrated care services locally and was developed in partnership with members from across the UK.

The RCN supports the broad aim of providing quality health and social care that is fully integrated for people using services and their families. The new toolkit will support members to influence strategic decisions around integration – whether services have been integrated for some time or are at the start of the process.

Download both publications from:

www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Tools of the trade



A new booklet from the Labour Research Department highlights a range of successful campaign tactics being used by unions to tackle punitive performance management systems and capability processes. It also contains practical guidance to help reps support individual members. Download *Performance Management and Capability Procedures – A Guide for Union Reps and Negotiators* from tiny.cc/capability

A Department of Health report has found that good quality work is beneficial to the health of those aged between 50 and 70, and employers have a role to play in helping their staff remain healthy. Read more at tiny.cc/dhreport

Acas has produced guidance on the Equality Act and disability discrimination for workers with multiple sclerosis, cancer or HIV. It includes information about how to tell colleagues and your manager about your condition, the role of your manager and reasonable adjustments. Visit tiny.cc/disabilitydiscrimination

This year's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development absence management survey highlights that more employers are failing to give managers the tools they need to manage absence effectively. The survey report explores absence management trends, policy and practice in the UK. Read more at tiny.cc/cipdabsence

Get in the know with the RCN's jargon buster

Do you know your HWBBs from your LWABs?

The RCN has developed a document to help reps understand the many abbreviations and names of new organisations now being used in England.

As sustainability and transformation plans develop in England, there are many new abbreviations being used within the documentation and discussions. Some of these are specific to different regions and plans, while others are more commonly used.

The RCN's document also includes an outline of some of the new organisations being formed. It is available in the RCN reps' hub which provides one-stop access to a range of publications, links and other resources to support your work. Visit tiny.cc/jargonbuster

The RCN website also hosts information on becoming a rep, including films of reps talking about their roles and an online expression of interest form for members wanting to find out more. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/reps

Report published on working longer

RCN reps may be interested in the findings detailed in two new RCN publications that have been produced to address issues associated with an ageing workforce.

The RCN's Working Longer Project is a report from a one year project funded by the Union Learning Fund. The RCN worked with five employers to understand how unions and employers can support staff to plan for working later in life. The report addresses the success and challenges encountered, as well as more general issues around working collaboratively.

Valuing Older Workers includes a 10-step action plan for working in partnership to create a learning culture that supports staff who work later in life.

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/publications

