

# Activate

Vol 14 No 1 September 2019

News, views and support for RCN activists



## Safe nurse staffing campaign: we take our fight to the public

The RCN is urging patients and the public to sign a petition calling on the government to fix the nursing workforce crisis in England. We've launched an advertising campaign to raise awareness of nurse shortages, which are having an impact on patient safety.

The full advert, which features the photo above, has the strapline: "Nurses are the people's people. Now we need to fight for them." They ask people to sign a new petition the RCN has created, which reads: "I'm calling on the government to invest in tomorrow's nurses, end this crisis and make clear in law who is truly accountable for safe and effective patient care."

There are almost 40,000 nurse posts vacant in the NHS in England, with serious staffing gaps in care homes and independent hospitals. The RCN's campaign was launched on the World Health Organization's first annual World Patient Safety Day, which aims to create awareness of patient safety and urge people to show their commitment to making health care safer.

Earlier this year, RCN members in Scotland secured new legislation on safe staffing levels after a similar law was introduced in Wales in 2016. Today's campaign calls for legislation to be brought forward in England to help address the nursing workforce crisis.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said: "We're issuing a stark warning that patient safety is being endangered by nursing shortages. We're calling on the public in England to fight for nurses and sign our petition calling on the Westminster government to invest in the future workforce and make clear who is accountable in law for safe patient care.

"Nurses are the single most trusted professional group in the whole country, with 96% of the public placing them at the top of a list of occupations including doctors, teachers, the police and scientists. Nursing staff are asking for your support in calling time on this crisis."

Sign the petition at [rcn.org.uk/peoplespeople-magazines](https://rcn.org.uk/peoplespeople-magazines). Find out more about our campaign for staffing for safe and effective care across the UK at [rcn.org.uk/safestaffing](https://rcn.org.uk/safestaffing)

## Remembering Andrew Parker



Many of you may remember Andrew Parker who was a prominent figure at RCN Congress. A life-long advocate for student nurses, Andrew, who died in 2010, was passionate about nursing education and often took the stand during Congress debates. In his memory, Andrew's family decided to sponsor the RCNi Student Nurse Award which they've done for the past five years. This came to an end this summer.

Andrew's son Philip said: "My father lived and breathed advocacy for student nurses so this seemed like the perfect way to commemorate him while also helping to support future generations of nurses. I've had the pleasure of helping to judge the finalists for the award during our sponsorship and it's been an honour to meet such talented and committed students who are brimming with ideas."

Andrew completed his nurse training in the mid-1950s and worked in the NHS until he became a nurse tutor in the 1970s. He went on to become Director of Nurse Education on the Isle of Wight. Find out more about the RCNi Nurse Awards at [rcni.com/nurse-awards](http://rcni.com/nurse-awards)

## Activate is evolving

**We're making some changes in response to your feedback following our research project**

So we can produce more tailored, high quality content, our print issue of *RCN Activate* will be moving to quarterly from this month. You'll receive your first quarterly print issue in January 2020.

Our quarterly magazine will contain more features and case studies, and will celebrate and share the amazing work you do for the College, your fellow members and nursing as a profession. We're also setting up a readers' panel so active members can help us shape the content.

Although our magazine is moving to quarterly, we'll still send you the latest news and information from the RCN in a monthly *Activate* email.

Make sure you're signed up to receive emails from the RCN by logging into [rcn.org.uk/MyRCN](http://rcn.org.uk/MyRCN) and updating your contact preferences.

You'll need to specify that you're happy for the RCN to contact you by email and also tick the option to receive *Activate* by email.

Don't forget, you can also find the latest *Activate* content online at [rcn.org.uk/activate](http://rcn.org.uk/activate)

The logo for RCN Activate, featuring the text "RCN" in a large, bold, white font above the word "ACTIVATE" in a smaller, bold, white font, all contained within a red circular background.

## RCN signs national learning agreement with one of UK's largest care home providers



**We'll be working in partnership with Caring Homes Group to promote and support lifelong learning**

Our new learning agreement provides a framework so we can work with the company to provide ongoing training and development for RCN members and other staff.

The agreement, which is the second of its kind for the RCN, also outlines the crucial role RCN learning reps play in promoting lifelong

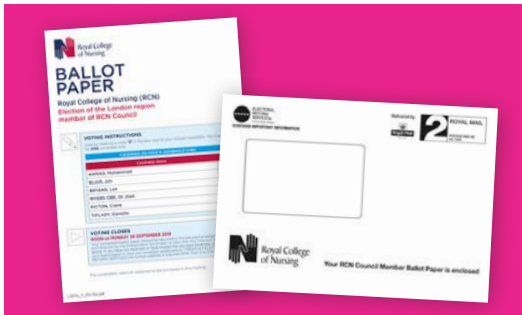
learning. It will support the creation of new learning reps roles in Caring Homes' services across the UK. So far, 14 learning reps have been recruited.

Nurse Jandryle Trondillo, who works for Caring Homes and is training to become a learning rep, said: "I'm passionate about learning and I'm already involved in supporting my colleagues with training. This is a great opportunity to build on that and give better support by incorporating what the RCN has to offer."

RCN National Officer Irene Murray said: "This agreement gives us the chance to support our members in the social care sector and it means learning reps know what to expect. It formalises that relationship so they can work in partnership with their employer.

"The RCN has a huge amount to offer as a professional body and learning reps have access to a wealth of resources to support development in their workplace, which in turn has a positive impact on patient care."

## Vote now in RCN Council elections



**You have until 30 September to choose who will represent you on RCN Council for the next four years**

Elections are taking place in the following eight constituencies; London, Northern, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South East, Wales, West Midlands and Yorkshire & the Humber. Successful candidates will be elected for four years with the term of office from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2023.

With only one candidate standing for election to the Eastern, East Midlands, North West, South West and Nursing Support Worker seats

on RCN Council, these candidates will be elected unopposed. Voting papers (pictured) have been sent to members in the post and should be returned as soon as possible. If you need to request new papers, call 02076 473 644 or email [elections@rcn.org.uk](mailto:elections@rcn.org.uk)

Outgoing Chair of RCN Council Sue Warner said: “The successful candidates will play a crucial role in strengthening our position at this pivotal time. I urge all of those who are eligible to vote to use this opportunity to choose candidates who represent your views and ensure your voice is heard.”

For more information, including full details of the candidates, visit [rcn.org.uk/councilelections](http://rcn.org.uk/councilelections)

### Don't forget...

There's still time to put yourself forward to stand for election to the RCN's Professional Nursing Committee (PNC) or Trade Union Committee (TUC). Nominations for both committees close on 4 October. To find out more visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-current-elections](http://tinyurl.com/rcn-current-elections)

## Guernsey members make some noise

The RCN is continuing to fight for a fair pay deal on Guernsey, where grassroots activists are making themselves heard.

They've been out protesting, securing the backing of the public, in their bid to secure a pay rise of more than 10% to bridge the gap with other civil servants on the island.

Their “honk for nurses” initiative, outside the equivalent of their Department of Health building, received so much support it caused complaints about the noise. More recently, members staged a march to demonstrate their passion for the cause.

## Being fair

NHS Resolution has published a new document which looks at how organisations can support a fair and just learning culture for staff and patients following incidents. The resource, *Being Fair*, was developed in response to the high numbers of compensation cases related to bullying and stress in the NHS.

RCN National Officer Kim Sunley said: “This could be helpful for RCN reps, and other active members, in the NHS in England who are working to improve the culture in their organisation. It highlights the importance of building strong partnerships with staff side and provides useful arguments and case studies to support this.”

To download *Being Fair* visit [tinyurl.com/NHS-being-fair](http://tinyurl.com/NHS-being-fair)

## Members in Northern Ireland prepare for ballot

This autumn, for the first time in the College's history, members in Northern Ireland will be balloted on industrial action, including strike action. As *Activate* went to press, RCN Council were due to finalise details of the ballot.

The ballot follows unsuccessful pay talks between unions and government officials and is in response to the safe staffing and pay crisis in Northern Ireland.

Nurses' pay within the health service in Northern Ireland continues to fall behind England, Scotland and Wales. Over the last eight years, the real value of their pay has fallen by 15% and there are currently nearly 3,000 unfilled nursing posts across the Health and Social Care Service (HSC), with a similar level of vacancies estimated in nursing homes.

Pat Cullen, RCN Northern Ireland Director, said: “Having too few nurses can lead to care being compromised, staff burnout, high levels

of sickness absence and a reliance on expensive agency staff to fill gaps in rotas. It is time for nursing staff to have their voices heard.”

Members in Northern Ireland are being encouraged to check the RCN has their correct contact details to ensure they receive their ballot paper. You can check and update your details at [rcn.org.uk/myRCN](http://rcn.org.uk/myRCN) or call 0345 772 6100. For the latest news, visit [rcn.org.uk/safestaffing/ni](http://rcn.org.uk/safestaffing/ni)





## We need the public to back us on mass



### RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair says we must get patients and the public to demand action on unsafe nurse staffing

On 17 September, we launched the public-facing side of our campaign for safe staffing in England. A lot of people know about the nursing shortages we're facing but we need to raise awareness of the impact of not having enough staff to deliver good care and keep our patients safe. Nurses, unable to deliver safe care, often vote with their feet and leave the profession resulting in further shortages across the health and social care system. This requires urgent action now and we are calling on the public to join our fight for safe staffing by signing our petition demanding the government takes action.

You'll be seeing us campaign in ways we haven't tried before – newspaper adverts, podcasts and using the most cutting-edge social media techniques to make sure all patients and members of the public know the importance of our campaign. We're keeping the pressure on in other ways too. Many of you are meeting with your MPs to tell them how short staffing is affecting you and your patients. I'll be doing the same when I attend the Conservative and Labour party conferences this autumn. I'll be making sure politicians know that nursing needs to remain high on the agenda and that without proper investment, clear accountability and better workforce planning, nursing shortages will continue to rise, as will the risk to patient safety.

As you know, members are shaping our campaign in England locally, and our public campaign will be feeding into regional activities. Elsewhere in the UK, our campaigning is at different stages. Although safe staffing laws have been introduced in Wales and Scotland, there is still work to be done. In Northern Ireland, a ballot for industrial action, including strike action, is imminent. Wherever people live in the UK, we need them to support us as we speak out for nursing so we can provide safe and effective care to everyone that needs it. Visit [rcn.org.uk/safestaffing](http://rcn.org.uk/safestaffing)

## ASK AN ADVISER



### Pregnancy and maternity



### Our new toolkits tell you everything you need to know about pregnancy in the workplace

At RCN Direct we receive a lot of queries about pregnancy and maternity. It can be an exciting time but it can also be confusing. There are a number of factors to consider such as when to tell your employer, your rights, whether your job poses any risks, maternity leave and how to calculate maternity pay.

To help answer all these questions and more, we've developed two new toolkits.

Our pregnancy toolkit covers everything from informing employers, sickness during pregnancy, miscarriage, changing shifts and changing jobs. Find it at [tinyurl.com/RCN-pregnancy](http://tinyurl.com/RCN-pregnancy)

Our maternity toolkit includes information about maternity pay and leave, sickness while on maternity leave, changing employers, flexible working, keeping in touch (KIT) days and returning to work. Visit [tinyurl.com/RCN-maternity-toolkit](http://tinyurl.com/RCN-maternity-toolkit)

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](http://www.rcn.org.uk/direct)  
**0345 772 6100**



## Holiday pay claims in Northern Ireland

The recent legal case of *Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland v Agnew & Others* looked at the calculation of holiday pay for police officers working in the police service in Northern Ireland dating back to the introduction of Working Time Regulations in 1998.

The claimants' holiday pay had been calculated based on their basic pay rather than taking account of their 'normal pay' including overtime and allowances.

The claimants submitted unlawful deduction of wages claims that were successful in the Employment Tribunal but the police service appealed, arguing that the claimants should be restricted in how far back they could claim.

This was in line with a ruling in a previous case in England in which the Employment Appeal Tribunal decided that a gap of more than three months between unlawful deductions in wages broke the 'series' and limited the claim.

The Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland disagreed in this case and concluded that a 'series' of deductions is a question of fact in each separate case and isn't automatically broken when there is a gap of three months. The case has now been sent back to the Tribunal to determine remedy but the police service may submit a further appeal to the Supreme Court.

This case may have implications for our members in Northern Ireland. If you'd like further advice on this, please contact RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100.

At the moment, this judgment is not binding on Tribunals in England, Scotland and Wales but the position may change if there is a decision from the Supreme Court on this issue. Read more at [tinyurl.com/NI-holidaypay](https://tinyurl.com/NI-holidaypay)

**Joanne Galbraith-Marten**  
RCN Head of Legal  
(Employment)



## View from the frontline



### Preparation is key

"Expect the unexpected" was written on a road sign that I frequently spotted as I travelled around New Zealand earlier this year. It was a safety campaign aimed at drivers. These signs made me reflect on my 24 years as an RCN steward and activist. These roles have often led me down the path of the unexpected, whether that's a member's personal situation or finding myself in a parliamentary committee room with MPs.

For me, one of the RCN's greatest attributes is its investment in activist education and development. This includes conferences, Congress, basic training and, something that has really taken off in the London region in recent years, our joint reps development days. These are held three times a year and recently our summer event attracted almost 50 members. These events not only provide a broad spectrum of learning opportunities but they allow local and regional networking. This is so valuable when you consider the vast skills and knowledge reps from around the region have to bring to the table. I must admit I've often gone on to use these activists as guest speakers at local branch meetings or study days. They know their specialist subject matter so well.

We may not know what's around the corner but with such great training offered and a wealth of shared experiences, there's a good chance we can meet the unexpected in a professional, helpful way.

**Mike Smith, RCN Stewards Committee member and Outer South West London Branch Chair**

## Push back to protect members' pensions



**RCN National Officer Nicola Lee explains how some NHS trusts are incentivising nursing staff to temporarily opt-out of their pension scheme and why we should push back**

### What's the issue?

Some NHS employers are offering nursing staff a higher rate of pay if they opt out of the NHS pension scheme for a certain period of time. It's being used as a recruitment and retention incentive but, in reality, it's detrimental for nursing staff in the long run. I understand some people need the extra income but the bottom line is that nursing staff shouldn't have to pay for their own recruitment and retention incentives by forfeiting their retirement income.

### How does it work?

The employer recycles the employer contribution they would have had to pay into the pension scheme and pays this directly to the member of staff instead. It can seem like an attractive offer because the employer contribution to the scheme is quite large and it would make quite a difference to someone's take-home pay. However, it makes an even bigger difference to someone's income in retirement and this is the problem.

### How does this impact on retirement income?

Coming out of the NHS pension scheme, even for a short period of time, can make a huge difference to someone's pension income in

*“Nursing staff shouldn't have to pay for their own recruitment and retention incentives”*

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activate](http://rcn.org.uk/activate)



Nicola Lee

retirement. Let's say someone in their early 20s is at the bottom of Band 5 now. They work until their normal retirement age and then live for 25 years in retirement. If they come out of the NHS pension scheme for two years then it could make a difference of at least £17,000 worth of pension benefits over their lifetime.

Also, if something happens to someone during the time they've opted out of the scheme, they'll receive no life assurance or survivor benefits for their loved ones.

### Is it legal?

It's a moot point. The RCN's position is that if it's not unlawful, then it's certainly not good practice. We've challenged trusts on this previously and reported them to the pension regulator through the NHS Pension Board. The regulator didn't rule on the matter but the trusts in question withdrew those incentive programmes.

### What can RCN reps do?

I'd encourage reps to try to resist proposals like this by suggesting their employer explores other options for incentives. There's a recruitment and retention premium that NHS trusts can apply for if they're really struggling to recruit nurses. Employers could also look at other incentives such as subsidised child care, flexible working or free car parking. We know that these are things members want.

### Have reps been able to make a difference previously?

Yes, definitely. It was reps who helped us challenge a scheme in London recently. If such schemes are put in place, I also think reps have a really important role to play in explaining to members what these schemes really mean and what the consequences are.

Of course members are free to make their own decision but they need to be given the details of what they're giving up.

### How can reps get more support?

If you want more information or support, you can call RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100 or contact your local RCN office. The NHS Business Services Authority has produced a useful film with guidance for people who are thinking of opting out. Watch the film at [tinyurl.com/opt-out-film](http://tinyurl.com/opt-out-film)



## Starting the conversation

### Can reps play a part in supporting work colleagues who may be thinking of suicide? New guidance suggests they can

A TUC resource published earlier this year makes it clear that workplace reps are not expected to be counsellors or experts in suicide prevention. But, the resource says, they are often the point of contact for staff members in crisis, and they can both support the person and steer them towards sources of help. “You don’t need any special training to be able to listen,” the TUC advises.

Up to 6,000 people in Britain end their own lives each year and government figures show there is a greater risk of suicide among female nurses than in other occupations.

Employers have a legal duty to provide a safe working environment and this includes addressing issues such as stress or bullying that may contribute to a worker having suicidal thoughts. Reps can play a part in ensuring employers have processes in place to identify those at risk.

Public Health England and Business in the Community have joined forces to produce a suicide prevention toolkit (see box).

In an introduction to the toolkit, Samaritans CEO Ruth Sutherland writes: “With a third of our lives spent at work, it is highly likely that there will be people struggling to cope in the workplace and possibly trying to hide it. There are lots of things we can all do to make a difference.”

### It’s OK to talk about suicide

So how can reps initiate a conversation with people they suspect are struggling with suicidal thoughts?

Tanja Koch, RCN Counselling Service Co-ordinator, and a counsellor herself, says: “It’s OK to talk about suicide – don’t be afraid to engage in a conversation.

### Designing a workplace suicide prevention programme

Key elements include:

- a work environment that values its employees
- education and training on mental health
- raising awareness of resources and available support
- clear policies, procedures and guidance for those who need support
- a plan for responding to a suicide attempt or death.

From *Reducing the Risk of Suicide: A Toolkit for Employers*. Find the toolkit at [tinyurl.com/reducing-risk-toolkit](http://tinyurl.com/reducing-risk-toolkit)

Words by Daniel Allen

My experience is that people will generally appreciate that you care.”

Choose an appropriate setting to initiate a conversation, Tanja suggests. Then start by expressing general concern – something like: “You don’t seem yourself lately.” She adds: “If the member then expresses suicidal feelings, reps should take every indication of self-harm seriously.”

If the member is at immediate risk, emergency services must be contacted, without the person’s consent if necessary, although it should be explained that confidentiality will have to be broken in order to safeguard them.

“If the member is not at immediate risk but has suicidal feelings, then gain consent to refer them to the RCN Counselling Service,” says Tanja. “And advise the member to make an emergency appointment with their GP and provide the Samaritans freephone number – 116 123.”

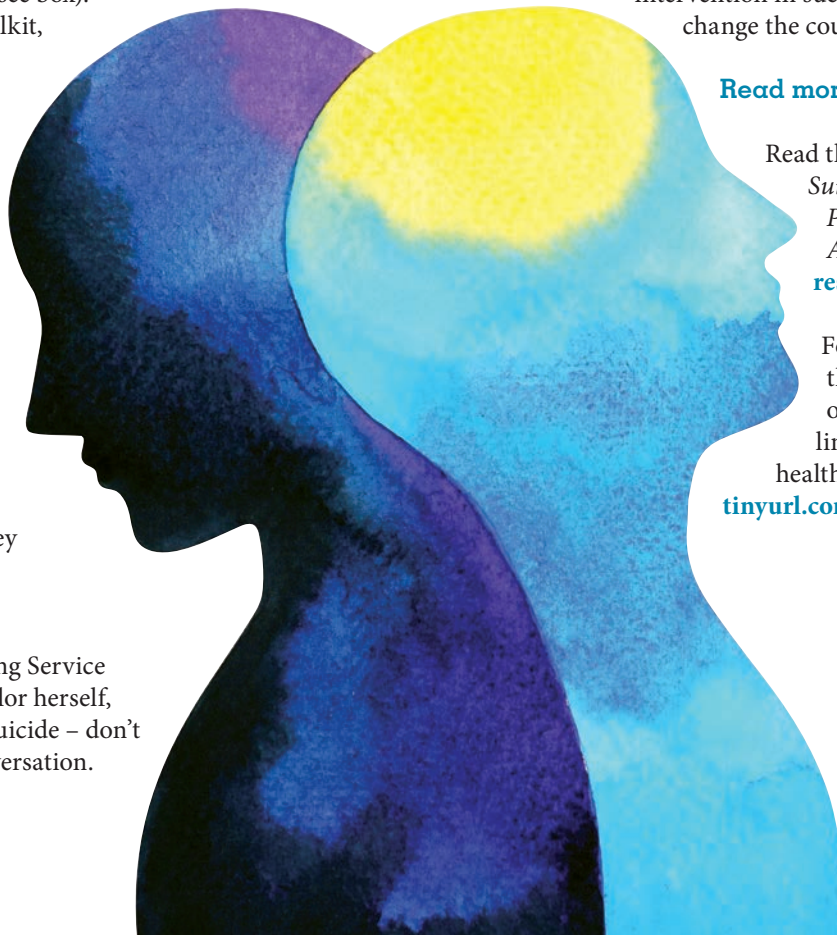
Such interactions with members may be distressing and Tanja advises that afterwards reps should take time out to care for themselves and, if necessary, tap into their support networks. But although difficult, a rep’s intervention in such circumstances can help change the course of a member’s life.

### Read more

Read the TUC’s guide *Work and Suicide: A TUC Guide to Prevention for Trade Union Activists* at [tuc.org.uk/resource/work-and-suicide](http://tuc.org.uk/resource/work-and-suicide)

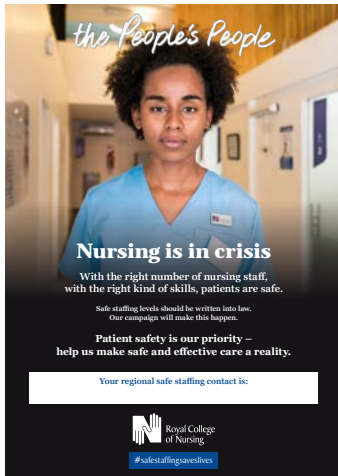
For information about work the RCN is undertaking on suicide awareness, and links to further guidance for health care professionals, visit [tinyurl.com/RCN-suicide-awareness](http://tinyurl.com/RCN-suicide-awareness)

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# NOTICEBOARD

Download safe staffing campaign materials from our online portal



Help spread the word about our safe staffing campaign with posters in your workplace

From the end of September, reps will be able to download RCN-branded poster templates from our Portal for Online Design (POD) to help promote our campaign for safe staffing in England.

We'll be adding more resources, such as social media graphics, as the campaign progresses.

If you don't already have a login and would like to request one, contact [juliet.adkins@rcn.org.uk](mailto:juliet.adkins@rcn.org.uk) or [anna.sonny@rcn.org.uk](mailto:anna.sonny@rcn.org.uk)

To find out more about the POD, and other RCN-branded resources, log into the RCN reps hub.

Look in the section "Quick links for resources" and find the "Resources to promote the RCN" link.

## #BeatTheFlu

Help beat the flu in your workplace

We've launched our **#BeatTheFlu** campaign in preparation for the start of winter and flu season.

One in four health care staff are estimated to be infected by the flu in any flu season. Having the flu vaccine is a simple way to protect yourself, your colleagues and your patients from the virus.

Please encourage members to have the vaccine and take part in our campaign to help beat the flu by raising awareness of the benefits of the vaccine.

Spread the word by adding our **#BeatTheFlu** twibbon to your social media profiles. You can



also download a myth buster poster for your workplace at [rcn.org.uk/beat-the-flu](http://rcn.org.uk/beat-the-flu) or order hard copies from [publications@rcn.org.uk](mailto:publications@rcn.org.uk)

## Want to have your say on nursing issues?

You can now apply to represent your branch or first choice forum as a voting member at RCN Congress 2020 in Liverpool.

Attending Congress as a voting member is an excellent opportunity to influence change and to have your say on issues that matter to you and your colleagues. Voting members sit in the main hall during Congress debates and

vote on resolutions which inform and shape the College's future work. The RCN will fund travel and accommodation for voting members, and cover expenses (in accordance with the RCN's expenses policy) during the times they're required to attend to vote.

The deadline for applications is 29 November. To apply, visit [tinyurl.com/voting-congress](http://tinyurl.com/voting-congress)

## Tools of the trade



A free toolkit about tackling occupational health problems is available from The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. View guidance and training materials to help support you in your workplace at [tinyurl.com/OHtoolkit](http://tinyurl.com/OHtoolkit)

The latest edition of the Labour Research Department's annual guide to health and safety highlights union concerns about health and safety protections post-Brexit. It also includes updates on statutory regulations and individual union guidance. Find the guide at [tinyurl.com/LRD-guide](http://tinyurl.com/LRD-guide)

There's increasing interest from policymakers in social prescribing as a means of improving public health and wellbeing. A new report from The Work Foundation investigates the value attached to work and barriers to work, and related outcomes in social prescribing. Visit [tinyurl.com/WFsocialprescribing](http://tinyurl.com/WFsocialprescribing)

NHS Employers has produced a briefing about recent policy developments and future directions of NHS staff training. It examines alternative training routes such as apprenticeships, extended roles and nursing education. Read more at [tinyurl.com/past-future-reflect](http://tinyurl.com/past-future-reflect)