

LABOUR DEBATE: HEALTH, NURSING PAY

Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

Background

Pay awards for NHS staff have been constrained by the UK Government's policy on public sector pay since 2011. Currently a 1% cap applies. The Scottish Government's Public Sector Pay Policy sets out a similar 1% maximum increase for those earning over £22,000.

Since 2011 the pay cap has resulted in a real terms drop in earnings for nursing staff in the NHS of between 9% and 14%.

Pay awards for NHS staff are made based on recommendations from the independent NHS Pay Review Body (PRB).

To date the RCN has supported four-country pay bargaining through the PRB. In light of continued pay restraint, and questions over the independence of the PRB, the RCN has run a pay poll with its members, asking them what action should be taken next on pay. One of the options put to members was to ballot for industrial action. The pay poll closed on Sunday. As yet, the results are unavailable.

Scrap the Cap campaign

The RCN has been running a campaign called 'Scrap the Cap' which calls on Governments to end the pay restraint for nursing pay. RCN believes that a pay award for nursing staff should be made in line with retail price index (currently 2.6%).

Loss of earnings is severely impacting on nursing staff's quality of life. RCN members are reporting low levels of morale and feeling increasingly undervalued.

This, coupled with increasing workloads, is leading to stress and fatigue, and ultimately, is negatively impacting on the quality of care being delivered to patients.

NHS Pay Review Body

On behalf of RCN members and with other NHS trade unions representing staff on Agenda for Change contracts, the RCN submitted [evidence to the NHS PRB for the 2017 pay round](#). In its evidence the RCN asked for an above inflation pay rise which has been ignored.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government confirmed that the pay increase for NHS staff in Scotland will be capped at 1% for 2017/18 for those earning over £22,000. As a result of the decision, the gap between nurses pay and the cost of living will grow ever wider.

It should, however, be noted that the Scottish Government has implemented recommendations made by the PRB to date, even when the UK Government has not. This means that whilst terms and conditions remain broadly equivalent across all countries pay rates for each of the pay bands vary. For example, that the starting salary for a new qualified nurse is £21,909 in England and Wales, £22,218 in Scotland and £21,693 in Northern Ireland.

Nursing workforce pressures

Short term policy decisions about the supply of nursing staff, stemming from the imperative to cut public sector spending, together with the impact on recruitment and retention of an artificial limit on nurses' salaries when inflation is rising. This situation is not sustainable.

Budget savings achieved through pay restraint are being used to meet efficiency-saving targets for the NHS. This has resulted in NHS staff pay falling way behind the cost of living and many nursing staff are now struggling to survive on their current pay packet.

Simultaneously, nursing staff are facing mounting challenges - dealing with an unprecedented increase in demand and patients with increasingly complex needs, as well as chronic staff shortages in the workplace and intensified workloads.

Workforce in Scotland

Nursing levels are at historically high levels, but the rising demands on our health and care services mean that staff are under pressure like never before.

RCN's centenary survey of its members in 2016 showed that staffing levels were their biggest concern, as they just don't feel they have enough time to care for their patients.

Health boards are struggling to recruit and retain enough nurses and the continuing cap on pay is putting further pressure on already overworked nursing staff.

Without the right number of nursing staff, patients simply do not get the care that they need, whether that is in hospital, at home, in a care home or in another health and care setting. Nursing staff want to do their very best for patients, but their best efforts are often coming up against the reality of vacancies in the workforce.

The total nursing and midwifery vacancies as at 31 December 2016 can be broken down as:

Community

654.9 WTE vacancies, including 206.7 WTE vacant for 3 months or more. 5.4% overall vacancy rate.

Hospital

1797.7 WTE vacancies, including 511.7 WTE vacant for 3 months or more. 4.0% overall vacancy rate.

The reality for nursing staff

There must be a meaningful pay rise for nursing staff to prevent wages falling further behind inflation, and pay levels in comparable professions. This is important for morale and motivation in the short-term, and for recruitment and retention in the longer-term.

The RCN's most recent Employment Survey of members [Sep 2015] found that:

- 30% had struggled to pay gas and electricity bills
- 14% had missed meals because of financial difficulties
- 53% had been compelled to work extra hours to increase earnings
- 32% were working extra night/weekend shifts to help pay bills and everyday living expenses

This corresponds with a year on year increase of 30%, over the past 5 years, on the number of RCN members seeking specialist money advice from the RCN's Welfare Service [Dec 2016 statistics]. This contact from RCN members focuses predominantly on dealing with unmanageable consumer credit debt.

RCN members are borrowing more money to meet essential costs associated with the rising costs of childcare and day to day living expenses. Many are taking second jobs, and some are having to use food banks to feed their families.

The RCN careers service has seen a marked increase in calls from members with families seeking advice on career options outside of the nursing profession, often citing pay restraint and the increasingly limited opportunities for skilled and experienced nurses to progress in their careers.

Members are telling us that they are relying on unsocial hours pay to make up for low pay levels. The RCN Employment Survey from 2015 found that:

- 80% of respondents in the NHS work unsocial hours; of those respondents, a third state that they do so sometimes and two thirds state that they do so regularly
- two thirds of respondents rely on unsocial hours payments to make ends meet, a further quarter relies on them to help manage caring responsibilities and 18% rely on unsocial hours to pay for childcare

Nursing Counts manifesto

The RCN's manifesto ahead of the general election, [Nursing Counts](#), is calling on parties to end the 1% pay cap and pay a fair wage to all members of nursing teams.

In its manifesto for the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections [Nursing Scotland's Future](#), RCN Scotland asked that 'Scotland's politicians champion better pay, terms and conditions for members of nursing teams, no matter their grade or where they work. MSPs from across the parties backed the Nursing Scotland's Future manifesto.

For further information please contact Sarah Atherton, Public Affairs Officer, by email at sarah.atherton@rcn.org.uk or on 0131 662 6172.