

# Activate

Vol 12 No 6 February 2018

## News, views and support for RCN activists



### Taking to the streets

#### RCN activists joined tens of thousands of protesters in London to fight for the future of the NHS

The event, organised by Health Campaigns Together and anti-austerity group the People's Assembly, culminated in a rally opposite Downing Street.

Pouring rain couldn't dampen the spirits of RCN members as they pounded the streets in defence of the health service. Many travelled miles to attend, using precious time off to demand change.

RCN President Cecilia Akrisie Anim delivered a passionate speech to the gathered crowd.

"Nursing staff are bearing the brunt of the enormous pressures facing the NHS," she said. "Staff at every level are experiencing burnout and many of our colleagues are turning

their backs on jobs they love. Urgent action is needed to address the current crisis – if none is taken, it is our patients who will suffer."

Her sentiments were echoed by other members who attended the march.

Denise Souter said: "We love our job of looking after people but we need to get support to do it safely and to ensure the best possible care for our patients. We cannot lose this great service."

Sian Hooban added: "I've been passionate about the NHS for the past 35 years I've worked in it. It saved my daughter's life and it has to be there for everybody else when they need it."

The RCN supported members to attend the march as part of its Close the Gap campaign, which demands an above-inflation pay increase for NHS nursing staff.

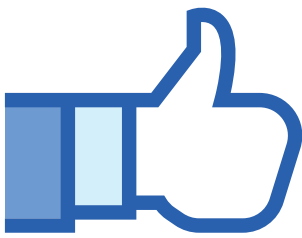
## Calling all retired members

The RCN will be holding a conference on 20 June to explore how it works with retired members and how to make best use of their skills and experience.

Members are involved in developing the programme for the event, which will be held at RCN HQ in London.

Anyone interested in attending should save the date or email [wendy.irwin@rcn.org.uk](mailto:wendy.irwin@rcn.org.uk) for more information.

## Facebook for HCAs



Are you an active HCA or HCSW member of the RCN? If so, have you joined the RCN Health Practitioner Facebook group?

It's a vibrant space to network, share news and views, engage with your peers across the UK, and keep up-to-date on how the RCN Health Practitioner Committee is representing you.

The group is exclusive to RCN members and the more of you who join, the bigger, better and louder it becomes.

Join the conversation at <http://tiny.cc/HP-Facebook>

## Learning agreement with Interserve Healthcare

**The RCN is to sign a learning agreement with a leading homecare service provider to promote development opportunities for staff**

The agreement with Interserve Healthcare will mean all its staff, including agency workers, will have access to RCN resources. Interserve will also formally recognise and support RCN learning reps, six of whom have already been recruited.

RCN Associate Director for Employment Relations Josie Irwin said: "The RCN is pleased to form a learning partnership with Interserve Healthcare. This agreement is timely, as the RCN has a strong commitment to our members in the agency nursing sector. We very much welcome the six newly recruited RCN learning reps who will play

a pivotal role in sharing and signposting our members and their health care colleagues to the wealth of RCN learning resources."

Andy Cook, Chief Nurse at Interserve Healthcare, added: "We are delighted to be working with the RCN and look forward to the benefits it will bring to us as a care provider, to our staff and, ultimately, the patients whose lives we support every day."

RCN member Arianne Shephard will be one of the new learning reps. "This is an exciting opportunity to embrace a role which will enable me to help others learn, grow and develop in person and as practitioners," she said.

The RCN has an online advice guide for agency workers. Access it at <http://tiny.cc/agency-guide>

## Agenda set for Congress 2018

The RCN has published the list of hot topics to be debated at this year's Congress in Belfast. The 23 agenda items cover a whole range of nursing issues from the use of body cameras to improve staff safety, to the role of robots in health care and the decriminalisation of cannabis for medicinal use.

The topics are designed to inspire strong debate, and have been decided upon by the Congress Agenda Committee after two intense days of deliberation.

"It's a really well balanced and contemporary agenda," said Chair of RCN Congress Stuart McKenzie. "It reflects all that is good about nursing and shows there is nothing we're afraid to debate, be that professional, political, controversial or internal."

The Congress debates kick off on Sunday 13 May with an item about the dwindling nurse workforce and the failure of the Government to recruit and retain registered nurses.

"I'm expecting that one to be lively, especially as it only addresses the registered workforce," said Stuart. "But that's what we want. We want to have those conversations. It's a meaty debate and it'll push us into determining where we stand on the issue."



The full Congress agenda can be found at [www.rcn.org.uk/congress](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congress) but you can submit emergency items up to and during the event itself.

For Stuart it's about having items that showcase the three key things he feels define the purpose of the RCN; to be professional, political and improve patient care.

"If you get it right for patients, you get it right for staff," he said.

## Action needed to encourage nursing applications



**The number of students starting nursing degree courses is likely to fall again this year unless the Government takes urgent action, according to an RCN report**

The report, *Left to Chance*, contains new figures which show the current number of applications for the next academic year has fallen by a third since the same point in 2016, and by 13% since last year.

This is despite Government attempts to boost the number of trainee nurses following the publication of the Francis report into care failings in Mid Staffordshire five years ago.

Last year, ministers repeatedly announced extra nurse training places but the RCN's analysis shows not enough students are applying to fill them.

In addition to the university student shortages, the new nursing apprenticeship attracted only

30 trainees against a Government ambition of 1,000 apprentices this year.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Janet Davies said: "Nursing is a wonderful career but the Government must do more to make it attractive to the tens of thousands of new nurses we need. If ministers fail, they are storing up unimaginable problems for the future. The staffing crisis must be stopped from spiralling further."

The report says a nationwide Government campaign is urgently needed to encourage would-be nursing students to apply before the summer in order to boost the numbers joining England's nursing workforce in 2021.

It also calls for a range of incentives to encourage people into nursing, including a central funding pot in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to help with students' costs; more incentives for post-graduates to convert to nursing; and the DHSC and Treasury to cover the cost of apprenticeships to encourage greater uptake by NHS employers.

Janet added: "Five years after the warnings and lessons in the Francis report, the Government is still squandering the chance to address the issue – making care failings more likely, not less. The Government knows that when there aren't enough nurses, patients can pay the very highest price."

## Election round-up

Lors Allford has been elected as Chair of the RCN Trade Union Committee, which will oversee the RCN's union work. Lors has previously served as the member of RCN Council for the South West region, and as Vice Chair of Council.

Tracey Budding, former Council member for the West Midlands, was elected Vice Chair.

Melanie Johnson was elected as Chair of the RCN Professional Nursing Committee, which will lead the College's professional work.

Melanie has been involved in a number of RCN forums, including the Nurses in Management and Leadership Forum. She is currently the Director of Nursing and Patient Experience at City Hospitals Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust. The elections for Vice Chair are still open.

In elections for the RCN Students Committee, Charlotte Hall was re-elected as Chair and Georgina Ledwith elected as Vice Chair.

*Hear more from Melanie Johnson on page 4.*

## NHS70 awards

As part of the celebrations to mark the 70th birthday of the NHS in July, NHS England is asking MPs to nominate individuals or teams for a series of awards for excellence in health care.

It also wants people to contact their MPs with suggestions for nominations. So if you know someone deserving, this is a great opportunity to begin or build on your relationship with your MP.

Find all the information you need at <https://tinyurl.com/y7wfk2g>

## RCN Magazines online



Don't forget you can now read all the *Activate* feature articles, plus exclusive online content, on the RCN Magazines website.

So wherever you are, you can keep up to date with the issues that matter to you via your phone, tablet or computer.

You can also read articles from the RCN's main member magazine, *RCN Bulletin*, and there's tailored content for student and HCA members as well.

Visit [www.rcn.org.uk/magazines](http://www.rcn.org.uk/magazines)

## Leading the way



### The Chair of the RCN's Professional Nursing Committee Melanie Johnson on stepping into a brand new role

The creation of two separate committees to steer the RCN's professional and trade union work is a landmark moment for the College, and one I was keen to throw my support behind by standing for election. I was delighted to be elected as Chair of the committee, and to be given the opportunity to work alongside such a diverse and experienced group of RCN members with such passion for nursing.

I've been a member of the RCN since 1983 and have been involved with various forums over the years. I feel very strongly about the identity of the College from a professional perspective. Professional issues are more important than ever before; safe staffing levels, recruitment and retention, pre- and post-registration education – these are all close to my heart.

But the committee isn't for following personal interests. It's about tackling the issues facing RCN members and carrying out the priorities of RCN Council as decided at Congress. I'm looking forward to working closely with Council, and with my colleagues on the RCN Trade Union Committee. We are two sides of the same coin and, although approaching things from different angles, will work together whenever possible.

I'm very excited about my new role and using my skills and experience to allow the committee to work effectively.

*"Professional issues are more important than ever before"*

## ASK AN ADVISER



### Indemnity myths



#### Dispelling the misconceptions around RCN indemnity

RCN Direct generally receives more indemnity related queries than any other topic. It's an area that quite rightly concerns our members, and having appropriate professional indemnity is also a legal necessity for many. Nurses and midwives must hold an indemnity arrangement in order to be on the register and it's also a revalidation requirement.

But the nature of the RCN's indemnity cover often confuses our members. Have you ever heard members say, "I have to arrange personal indemnity cover for my work as an employee", or, "I don't qualify for RCN indemnity, so there's no point in me keeping my membership"?

An RCN indemnity myth buster clarifies these common misunderstandings. It includes useful information for practice nurses and occupational health nurses, along with guidance around advanced nursing practice, including prescribing. There's also guidance for employed and self-employed members. Find out more at [www.rcn.org.uk/indemnity](http://www.rcn.org.uk/indemnity)

**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**

## View from the frontline



MPs Helen Whately (front row, fourth from left) and Rosie Duffield (front row, third from right) with members of the RCN East Kent branch

### Face-to-face contact

As Chair of the RCN East Kent branch I was delighted when two of our local MPs, Conservative Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) and Labour's Rosie Duffield (Canterbury), accepted our invitation to attend a branch meeting.

My fellow branch officers and I worked hard to make sure we had a good turnout. An email went out to branch members and we put up posters, but there's no substitute for face-to-face contact. We talked to people we knew would have good ideas and asked them if they could come prepared to speak about issues they were passionate about.

Some of the many topics covered included making better use of experienced nurses' skills, staffing levels and the RCN's Close the Gap pay campaign. Members spoke frankly and at times bluntly about their experiences. Both Helen and Rosie were keen to listen to them and asked for more information about some of the ideas they put forward to improve things.

We tend to assume MPs are well-informed about everything but that's not always the case, and they can't be experts in all areas. But it's important to get them on side because they can make things happen. One of the reasons they accepted our invitation was because they had already met some of our members at their surgeries, so they knew it would be a positive and constructive event. We will keep in touch with them and continue to pass on information. Personal contact is the way forward.

**Cecilia Duggan, Chair, RCN East Kent branch**

## LEGAL UPDATE



### Collective bargaining

Employers should take care not to bypass collective bargaining by going over the heads of unions and making offers directly to workers.

In *Kostal UK Limited v Dunkley and Others* the employer, Kostal UK, had previously entered into a voluntary recognition agreement with Unite in February 2015. As the only recognised union in the workplace, Unite had sole bargaining rights and in October 2015 requested formal pay negotiations for 2016 commence.

The employer proposed a first pay offer in November 2015. The union did not recommend this offer and its members rejected it. In December, the employer wrote directly to all workers explaining the terms of the offer and the implications of not accepting it. Then, in January 2016, it wrote again to workers who had not accepted.

The union alleged this bypassed collective bargaining and issued claims on behalf of 57 members in the Employment Tribunal. The claims were upheld in respect of both the December and January offers and all claimants were awarded £3,800 for each, with the total award exceeding £400,000.

The employer appealed both the liability and remedy decision. The Employment Appeal Tribunal rejected both appeals on the basis that a "prohibited result" occurs when offers are agreed directly, and not through collective negotiations, and, as in this instance, that was the employer's sole or main purpose.

Furthermore, as the claimants received two offers amounting to unlawful inducements, there was no discretion for the Employment Tribunal to make any other award.

For legal support from RCN experts visit [www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/legal-help](http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/legal-help)

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



## A new community of reps

**Activate hears how an RCN initiative is helping reps share knowledge and feel more valued**

“Every RCN rep makes a difference in their workplace,” says Mairead O’Siochru from the RCN’s learning and development team. “They make both big and small changes that bring unparalleled benefits to the working lives of members, which in turn impacts on the quality and safety of patient care. When those stories of change are captured and shared they empower the whole rep community and sow the seeds for more change.”

This idea of promoting and celebrating the vital work reps do is central to the RCN’s “changemaker” initiative, which was set up last year as part of the Value of Reps project. Twenty-two reps initially signed up as changemakers, and their experiences were documented in an RCN book, *The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words*, which launched at the most recent joint reps’ conference in Milton Keynes. Since then, the initial cohort have been joined by nearly 100 more changemakers, all keen to be part of a vibrant and growing community of reps.

But what exactly does being a changemaker involve?

“A changemaker is a rep who has stepped forward and made a commitment to share their stories, ideas and energy in ways that motivate and inspire others to be changemakers in their own workplaces,” explains Mairead. “They are passionate about building a common energy to effect positive change and have a strong level of commitment and enthusiasm for sharing their learning with others. Every rep has the potential to be a changemaker.”

### Thinking differently

For Jayne Greenop (pictured), an RCN steward at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, and one of the original 22, the changemaker initiative gives a name and recognition to what many reps already do.

“It’s certainly changed how I think about things,” says Jayne. “Most active reps are already changemakers, they just don’t realise it.”



*“It’s changed how I think about things”*

“We have a tendency to just go about our work without stopping to think about the difference we make. That’s what becoming a changemaker has made me realise. It makes you think differently about how you work and the effect you have on others, which makes you realise your value as a rep.”

Jayne says signing up has also provided her with new opportunities. “I was asked to go to RCN headquarters to speak to new staff about the work we do as reps. I think we sometimes assume people know what we do, but that’s not necessarily the case, so it’s important to put ourselves out there.”

### What’s in it for me?

Mairead says: “As an RCN changemaker you have the opportunity to join a community of reps who have made a commitment to sharing ideas and learning to inspire, improve and innovate. We will work with you to provide an online space for you to connect and share with one another, as well as ways of getting your stories out there to motivate and inspire others. We will also provide opportunities for you to share your ideas with us about how we can make changes to help you to be even more effective.”

Download *The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words* or order a hard copy at <http://tiny.cc/the-value-of-reps>

## Let's be sociable

**Facebook groups are a great way to connect with members and get them involved in your RCN work. But effective moderation is key to their continued success**

The use of Facebook to connect and support members has exploded over the last 18 months. There are now almost 100 closed RCN Facebook groups, including one for nearly all the professional nursing forums, as well as those for branches, regional reps and students.

They can provide a great space to share news, seek advice, promote events and discuss nursing issues. But more than anything, they can help further your reach as an RCN activist, engaging members in ways not accessible before the advent of social media.

For Liz Jeremiah, Chair of the RCN Portsmouth branch, it's enabled better support for members with almost instant results.

"We've had members ask questions about, for example, revalidation," she says. "One asked how she could access online learning as she was part-time and wanted to study in a way that suited her home and family life. Within a couple of hours a number of other members, including learning reps, practice educators and others in similar positions, had responded with some really great advice."

Though a small patch, the Portsmouth branch Facebook group now has nearly 500 members. But while Liz is keen to encourage healthy debate, she has a no-nonsense attitude when it comes to moderation. "If a member has posted something with bad language I remind them that it will not be tolerated," she says. "Members are not to post anything which may be regarded as inflammatory or disrespectful and I will remove comments and posts, if required."

### Simply be sensible

Liz is guided by the principles set out in the NMC's publication on using social media responsibly and is supported by RCN Regional Communications Manager Helen Wigginton.

"We do check that those requesting to join the group are members and ask questions to avoid accepting people who may wish to post about



***"Bad language will not be tolerated"***

their own agenda or act in a way detrimental to others, the RCN or local employers," says Helen.

For the most part, however, discussions are positive. "We really haven't had to moderate very much," she assures. "The group is a safe and friendly place to talk about workplace issues and for members to seek support from each other."

"My advice is simply to be sensible. Though the groups are closed, anything posted on there can still be copied and shared. So long as members behave as they would do in a professional work setting, using language as they would if face-to-face, treating others as they would in person, and not breaching the NMC code, then social media and all its benefits should be embraced."

### In a nutshell

The NMC's guidance on using social media gives clear advice on how to behave online. It says you put your registration at risk if you act in any way that is unprofessional or unlawful including:

- sharing confidential information inappropriately
- posting pictures of patients without their consent
- bullying, intimidating or exploiting people
- inciting hatred or discrimination.

It's part of the NMC code to treat people with kindness, respect and compassion and maintain effective communication with colleagues. Think before you post, the guidance urges, and always protect your professionalism and reputation. Visit <https://tiny.cc/nmc-guide>

# NOTICEBOARD

## Independent organising

The RCN is focusing on how it recruits, retains and organises reps at four major independent sector employers.

This comes as part of the second phase of the RCN's Organising in the Independent Sector project, which aims to improve the RCN's presence and influence in independent sector workplaces by building teams of reps and helping them to work as a unit to recruit and support members more effectively.

This "organising model" is currently being tested at BMI, Virgin Healthcare, Elysium and Four Seasons Health Care.

RCN Employment Relations Adviser Irene Murray said: "This model is all about building the RCN from the bottom up and making sure we're being led by members on the ground."

"The focus of phase two will be to continue to recruit reps and build up RCN 'teams on the ground', embed the idea of reps as 'constant recruiters', and support members to develop campaigns from emerging workplace issues.

"So far reps involved have reported feeling less isolated, turnover is much lower and recruitment is easier as people are more attracted to the idea of being part of a team."

Activists interested in finding out more about trade union organising in their workplace can email [irene.murray@rcn.org.uk](mailto:irene.murray@rcn.org.uk)

## Tools of the trade



NHS Employers have produced *Language Competency: Good Practice Guidance for Employers* to assist with language competency assessment. Download a copy at <http://tiny.cc/language-assessment>

Guidance for employers on creating policies and handling sexual harassment in the workplace has been produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. For further information

and to download a copy of *Sexual Harassment and the Law: Guidance for Employers* visit <http://tiny.cc/equalityhumanrights>

A factsheet outlining the changes to data protection under the General Data Protection Regulation, due to come into force this May, has been produced by NHS Employers in conjunction with Capsticks. Find it at <http://tiny.cc/GDPR-factsheet>

## Film it

**A series of short films which help reps with their recruitment activity are now available online**

Two of the films show reps talking about the contributions they make and what they have gained personally and professionally from their roles.

A third shows highlights from the RCN's "changemaker" conference, where reps from across the UK met to share their experiences and swap ideas.

Reps are encouraged to direct any members thinking about taking on a union role to the films at [www.rcn.org.uk/become-a-rep](http://www.rcn.org.uk/become-a-rep)



A film to encourage non-members to join the RCN has also been produced. Find it at [www.rcn.org.uk/membership](http://www.rcn.org.uk/membership)

Read more about the changemaker initiative on page 6.

## Subscription fees

**RCN country and regional boards, forums and committees have until 1 March to provide feedback on a proposal to ask members to authorise Council to set subscription fees for the next five years**

Under the proposal, members who attend the RCN's annual general meeting (AMG) in May will be asked to vote to allow Council to continue to set the cost of RCN membership. This would enable the RCN to plan ahead and continue to provide the services members depend on. Council was last given permission to do this in 2013 and there has been no increase in fees since 2014.

It has committed to keeping any future increases as low as possible and not setting an increase higher than 4% in any one year. Yearly rates will only be set after consultation with members through branches and boards.

Council will agree the final wording for an AGM resolution in light of feedback received, so please let your board, forum or committee know your views so they can reflect them in their response.

The AGM will take place on the afternoon of Wednesday 16 May in Belfast, following the end of RCN Congress.