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The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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Safe staffing makes history

We're looking for volunteers to help interview and record members involved in our safe staffing campaign to create oral histories for the RCN archive. It's part of a project led by RCN President Professor Anne Marie Rafferty, the History of Nursing Forum and the archive team to capture campaign activity. You'll receive training and have expenses covered as you travel to speak to inspirational members who've been fighting to secure safe staffing across the UK. You'll also gain active listening and interviewing skills as you play a part in preserving the RCN's rich history. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/rcn-make-history

We'll hold new government to account over pre-election health pledges

The RCN has written to MPs elected in December's general election, stressing the urgency of the nurse staffing crisis and reiterating what needs to happen to support the future of the profession.

Responding to the election outcome, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said: "The prime minister must remember that the government's new mandate was secured on the back of health and care pledges over which we will hold them to account.

"Nursing cannot afford any more piecemeal workforce planning, nor underfunding and working conditions that both put off new recruits and cause experienced nurses to leave the profession they love. Much was said about nursing during the election campaign, and now the profession must be at the heart of the debate. Any attempts to row back from what patients need will be met with short shrift from the nurses who serve them."

Bill busting deals!



Don't let the cold snap break the bank

Visit RCNXtra for the best deal on your gas and electricity when you switch supplier and earn loyalty points to redeem on future purchases.

Xtra benefits. Xtra easy.
Register now at rcn.org.uk/xtra

Nominate now to recognise advanced practice

This year's RCNi Nurse Awards feature a new category for advanced nurse practitioners. Nominating yourself or a colleague is a chance to recognise the impact advanced nurse practitioners make as individuals, in teams, on patient care and nursing practice in all settings.

Nominations are also open for nurses, students and nursing support workers to share their innovations and expertise in nine other categories.

Members of the public are invited to nominate a nurse or health care assistant who has changed their life for the Patient's Choice award as well.

The overall winner of the awards is crowned RCN Nurse of the Year.

The deadline for entries is 17 January. Visit rcni.com/nurse-awards to nominate.



Is nursing work damaging your hands?

If so, we want to hear from you. We've launched a survey to find out about your experiences of caring for your hands at work and what support you've been offered if you've developed a skin issue. We want to know how poor skin health affects you doing your job and what steps are taken to reduce the risk of you developing work-related dermatitis.

Complete the survey before 12 January at tinyurl.com/rcn-skin-health-survey

£5k student grants welcome, but tuition fees must be scrapped too

Nursing students in England will receive at least £5,000 a year to help with living costs from September, the government has said. This will be supplemented by up to £3,000 for students entering specialties that struggle to recruit and for those living in places where nursing degree acceptances have fallen. An additional child care allowance will also be available.

RCN student members have been campaigning for more funding after the bursary, which covered university tuition fees and provided means-tested maintenance support, was scrapped in 2016. Since then applications to study nursing have dropped by 25% in England.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said: "With tens of thousands of vacant nurse jobs, serious measures are needed. This grant is a first victory for our campaign, but we will continue to call for nursing students not to pay tuition fees up-front. Any barriers for people wanting to enter nursing must be removed."

Wales safe staffing law extended to children's wards

Last month, we celebrated another victory in our campaign for safe staffing in Wales. Following the implementation of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act on adult wards in April last year, further campaigning led to the announcement that legislation would be extended to include paediatric inpatient services by April 2021, subject to approval by the National Assembly.

While this is welcome progress, we'll continue to fight for the law to cover more health care settings. RCN Wales Director Helen Whyte said: "This is an encouraging step, but it is still disappointing that the act has not been extended to other areas such as the community."

NI members poised to strike again



Nursing staff working in Health and Social Care (HSC) services will go on strike on 8 and 10 January, unless there's a last-minute breakthrough in pay negotiations

As *RCN Bulletin* went to press, members in Northern Ireland were preparing to join picket lines after their pre-Christmas strike didn't result in a pay offer that would see them get paid the same as nursing staff in the rest of the UK.

The strike on 18 December made headline news, with chronic nurse shortages highlighted in the national media. But despite a joint letter from leaders of the five main political parties in Northern Ireland urging Secretary of State Julian Smith to intervene to stop the strike, he refused, saying he didn't have the powers to promise a pay rise. Subsequent talks didn't deliver a resolution either.

The government in Northern Ireland collapsed in January 2017 and has been unproductive since, meaning health authorities have been unable to break the deadlock over the pay dispute. A breakthrough depends on parties compromising to form a new government. Talks are ongoing.

RCN Northern Ireland Director Pat Cullen said: "Members are angry that no-one appears to be taking the crisis in our health service seriously. We have written to the secretary of state to say we're extremely disappointed that talks with party leaders have failed to produce any resolution to the safe staffing and pay parity issues that form the basis of our action. We're also disappointed that attempts to negotiate an agreement leading to the restoration of the devolved institutions has failed.

"Although we wish to see political leadership and accountability in Northern Ireland restored, nurses deeply resent the link that is being made between this and resolving the crisis in health care. Sorting out this crisis is a priority regardless of our political situation, which has been in disarray for the past three years. We do not have another three years to wait. How much longer can this inaction continue before somebody, somewhere, takes a decision to rectify the problems we are facing?"

Visit rcn.org.uk/northernireland

Booking for RCN Congress now open



Secure your free place at the UK's biggest nursing conference in Liverpool this June

It's new year resolutions time. If developing your professional knowledge, jump-starting your career, or doing more interesting things are high on your must-do

🕒 Book your place, submit an idea for an emergency debate, and find out more at rcn.org.uk/congress

list, make sure you book your place at RCN Congress now.

What can you do at Congress?

- Take part in, or if you prefer watch and listen to topical discussions. The debates cover a range of professional issues covering clinical, staffing, financial, social and political matters. What we debate is important – the issues are often reported in the media direct from Congress, and they lead to wide-ranging work carried out by the RCN.
- We've not yet announced the keynote speakers but in past years our speakers have captivated audiences. For many the highlight of last year's event was hearing quadruple amputee Tom Ray talk about the impact sepsis had on him and how he developed resilience to overcome its devastating effects.

- Attend fringe events which cover a broad range of specialist areas of practice, workplace issues, careers advice, health and wellbeing and networking. It's a great way to develop your professional knowledge and can help with meeting your NMC revalidation requirements too.
- Look around the largest, most comprehensive, nursing exhibition of its type. If you want to, you can meet employers, universities, recruitment agencies and health care providers or see many of the latest innovations relating to your work.

So, what's the catch? There really isn't one.

It's free to attend and runs from Sunday 7 to Thursday 11 June. Even if you only come for the day, you're sure to get a lot out of it.

Nurses top trust survey again

Nursing has been revealed as the UK's most trusted profession by an annual survey. Nurses have topped the list four years in a row and are now more trusted than ever, with 95% of British adults saying they trust nurses to tell the truth, up from 93% in 2016.

Dame Donna Kinnair, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, said: "Trust is an essential part of a nurse's relationship with patients, and nurses know not to take this privileged position lightly."

Dee determined to make nursing voice heard



Dee Sissons has been elected to lead the RCN's governing Council from this month. She'll chair the group of 17 members, elected by you, to provide direction for the organisation.

Dee has nursing experience spanning four decades and has recently taken up the position of Chief Executive Officer at Rainbows Hospice for Children and Young People.

She said: "I am honoured to be elected to this role by my colleagues on RCN Council. I am determined that the voice of nursing is heard at the very highest level."

The big picture



John, from Birmingham, talks to RCN members and staff about our campaign in England to address chronic nursing shortages. He was one of hundreds to sign our safe staffing petition at an event in the city's Grand Central shopping centre last month. You can sign the petition at rcn.org.uk/peoplespeople-magazines

MEET THE MEMBER



Each month *RCN Bulletin* asks a member to share a little bit about themselves

Name: Sagila Thiruthanikasalan
Role: Nursing associate

Sum up what you do in a sentence:
Try to make patients' and colleagues' lives a bit easier.

Describe your job in three words:
Fulfilling, busy, emotional.

How long have you been nursing?
13 years.

How did you get to where you are now? I started as a GP receptionist, which took me into administration in the emergency department. In 2008, I was encouraged to develop into an emergency team assistant. Nine years later I became a trainee nursing associate, on a surgical ward, dealing with complex wounds. I qualified as a nursing associate in 2019.

If you weren't a nursing associate, what would you be? A life coach.

What's the best bit about your job? The sense of fulfilment I get from doing something worthwhile.

And the worst? Politics.

What helps you through a difficult day at work? There will always be one person or one situation that'll provide something positive in the day.

rcn.org.uk/myrcn



PATIENT PERSPECTIVE



Thea has a rare genetic condition called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS). She talks about how important it is that nursing staff understand her needs

As soon as I could talk, I complained about my knees hurting. My parents kept taking me to the doctor, but for years my pain remained unexplained. I was 10 before I was diagnosed.

EDS affects connective tissues that provide support in skin, tendons, ligaments, blood vessels, internal organs and bones.

By my teenage years, my knees would slide around my leg really easily and dislocations became an issue. Then I started to have autonomic problems, so would keep passing out. At 19 I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis.

These days the condition affects almost everything.

I spend a lot of time in hospital and my inpatient experiences have been mixed. At their best, my care has been really well co-ordinated, driven by senior nurses who understand that I have very unique needs and must not be moved by untrained staff. When they've been bad it's mainly because things have been rushed or there has been a lapse in communication. Shift changes can feel particularly worrying. Staff on one shift can totally nail it, but the next shift is a different story.

As a patient, you can really tell when nurses are having a bad day. It's usually because they're short-staffed and stressed, but it does affect their levels of empathy. It makes a huge difference when you have a lovely nurse, but it's much easier to be lovely when you're not over-worked.

THE VIEW FROM HERE



Nicola Moore
Nutritional therapist

If 2020 is the year you want to improve your diet and overall wellbeing, it might be best to start with small changes.

Firstly, focus on getting more protein in your meals to fill you up for longer and help stop those snacking temptations. This will help you keep going when you're on your feet throughout your shift and improve your mental health and energy levels.

Think about the protein you have in your regular meals. Any fish, eggs, meat, nuts or seeds? There's protein in vegetable sources like quinoa and frozen peas too.

Just focus on one meal to start with. If you're grabbing a croissant and a coffee for breakfast, perhaps it's time for a change. The protein in boiled eggs would be a great way to keep your energy levels up throughout the day.

Finally, try to have three meals a day. Challenging when you're working shifts, I know. But, having a proper meal before you start a night shift will help your body adapt and support your long-term health.

There's a direct link between how we feel and the food we put into our bodies. Remember that changing your diet doesn't need to be something you dread. It's something that could make you feel so much better.

@nicolamoorenutrition



What you've been saying

Solidarity with nurses in Northern Ireland

I totally support our nursing staff in Northern Ireland. Understaffing and lack of investment have removed goodwill, and nurses themselves know it's unsustainable due to patient safety. The UK government needs to implement parity of pay and properly fund our education and NHS after a lot of reform.

[Helen on Facebook](#)

I feel for the Northern Ireland nurses who have struggled on for so long without the government ensuring that the carers are cared for. Breaking point has determined their actions. They are chronically understaffed and paid less than nurses in the rest of the UK. Are we not one nation after all? How can this be acceptable?

[Tina on Facebook](#)

The nurses in Northern Ireland are facing a lot of the same issues we are on the mainland, but it's being exacerbated by the complete lack of leadership from the Stormont Assembly whose members haven't worked in over three years, and still get paid.

[Darren on Facebook](#)

Sort out student funding

No-one becomes a nurse to get rich, at least not financially, but it is the most wonderful, rewarding job. When I trained as a nurse 40 years ago, we got paid while studying and were provided with affordable accommodation. It breaks my heart that people really have to struggle if they enter the nursing profession nowadays.

[June by email](#)

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“ The new government must take decisive and urgent action to address the growing shortage of nurses and fix the crisis in social care

Dame Donna Kinnair, RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, on what needs to happen now to secure the future of the nursing profession

FOUR THINGS TO DO IN JANUARY

1. Celebrate nursing by entering yourself or a colleague for the RCNi Nurse Awards 2020: reni.com/nurse-awards
2. Complete our skin health survey before it closes on 12 January and tell us your experience of work-related hand dermatitis: tiny.cc/ctkmhz
3. Start your professional development this year by finding the right RCN event for you: rcn.org.uk/events
4. Visit the new RCN Library and Archive exhibition exploring the cultural context of emotions in nursing: rcn.org.uk/emotions-exhibition

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

The RCN Magazines team is always looking for members to contribute to the opinion pages. If you're keen to share your views, email bulletin@rcn.org.uk

HOT TOPIC



To celebrate International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, we asked members to share stories that show the true spirit of nursing

On May Day we had a patient in his 90s who said he'd never missed a maypole dance in his life. We made our own maypole out of an IV pole, played some music and the staff on the ward danced round in the middle of the bay weaving in and out as best we could. It made his day and he told everyone about it!

[@nicolaleigh3 on Twitter](#)

A colleague of mine was working on an orthopaedic surgical ward.

During a wedding reception, the groom broke his ankle and was admitted to hospital. The ward staff set up a side room so his immediate friends and family could carry on celebrating the wedding and have a little party while he was waiting for his operation.

[Jenny by email](#)

In dementia care the true essence of a nurse comes from focusing on the individual, placing them at the centre of everything and ensuring they're engaged and involved in all aspects of their life wherever possible. So many good experiences come from this.

[@77McG on Twitter](#)

MESSAGE TO MEMBERS



Dame Donna Kinnair RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary

2020 is a momentous year for nursing. Designated the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife by the World Health Organization, it's an opportunity to showcase what nursing is, and the difference it makes, today. Too often nursing is still perceived to be a role by the bedside, holding patients' hands, and providing basic care. While our compassion is what we've become famed for, our profession is so much more these days. We are leaders, innovators, problem solvers, advocates. We prescribe, we perform procedures and we push the boundaries of what is possible. We are nursing staff and we are amazing.

That's why we must be valued and invested in. Many promises were made ahead of the general election and some, such as student funding in England, are starting to come to fruition. We now need nursing student tuition fees to be scrapped in full and for there to be more incentives for nurses to want to stay in the profession.

Unsafe staffing levels are threatening our ability to provide quality care. We'll not stand for this. Before Christmas I joined our members on the picket lines in Northern Ireland. For the first time in the RCN's history, they felt compelled to strike. I was so proud to be among them, fighting for safe staffing and fair pay. Please, this year, be part of our campaign to secure safe nurse staffing levels across the UK.

rcn.org.uk/safestaffing



'I'm caught in the middle of student funding mistake'



This photo sums up how I'm feeling. I'm smiling on the outside, but inside I'm struggling to keep my cool. I am in fact, pretty furious. This here is an exhausted, physically and emotionally drained student paediatric nurse, desperate for recognition of the effort she puts into our NHS.

When I began my course in September 2017, I was one of the first cohorts to miss out on the bursary and course fee exemption. However, I wanted to do it. I desperately wanted to make a difference, so I applied in the hope that when uptake started to fall, the situation may be rectified.

As it happens, I'm probably one of a few thousand student nurses caught in the middle of a huge government mistake. I'm going to leave university with a

degree that I'm proud of, but I'm also going to leave with £50,000 worth of debt despite working 40-hour weeks in the NHS while on placements.

I'm going to leave an exhausted, utterly drained and completely different person to the one I was just over two years ago.

So why do I continue to do it? I have a love, and genuine passion for what I do. I'm in a position to make a difference to the lives of sick and vulnerable children and there's not much more rewarding than that. But I feel the government has taken advantage of student nurses like me, thrown us into the deep end knowing our drive will see us swim without support.

I'm swimming and I won't give up, but I'm crying out for help. I keep going because I have no choice, but that doesn't make my struggles right, fair or necessary.

This is an extract from Jess's student nurse mummy blog on Facebook. The RCN is seeking further detail on whether maintenance loan debt incurred by nursing students between 2017-2020 will be written off. See tinyurl.com/tdq2pl2 for more.

8 FEATURES



10 tips for job searching

Will 2020 be the year you make a fresh start in your career? Julie Watkins, RCN careers coach, shares her top tips for looking for a new role

1 Feel inspired
If you're not sure what kind of role you're after, take a look at the RCN's online careers pages for inspiration: tinyurl.com/rcn-career-crossroads



2 Know the job market and opportunities out there
Consider where you'll search for jobs. Start by visiting tinyurl.com/rcn-job-search, where you'll find links to help you.

3 Use this copy of RCN Bulletin
Turn to page 17 to see job ads for different nursing specialties or visit rcnbulletinjobs.co.uk

4 Get smart about how you browse for jobs online
Use inverted commas if you want to search for a specific phrase, or a specific order of words. For example, if you type "practice nurse", you should get results that contain this specific term, instead of results that contain the word "practice" and the word "nurse".

5 Save time by setting up job alerts
Register your job preferences with a job search website by submitting information like job title, field, pay, or location. The jobs website will notify you by email or text when jobs that match your description come up.

TOP TIP
If you're a registered nurse, always make sure you're acting within the NMC Code when using social media

6 Twitter time
Follow an organisation that advertises jobs on Twitter. Follow the RCN too and you might see useful courses running in your local RCN office to help you get your dream job: [@theRCN](https://twitter.com/theRCN)



7 Don't forget traditional adverts
Many jobs are still printed in journals, newspapers and in the local press.

8 Get a LinkedIn account
Use this online professional network to join relevant discussion forums or contact people that you might not otherwise have access to. Make sure your profile is up-to-date so potential networks get an insight into your professional qualities, skills and experience: uk.linkedin.com

9 Be proactive
Don't wait until you see a vacancy. Contact employers and attend job fairs. Build your network and enquire about potential vacancies. RCNi Nursing Careers and Jobs Fairs are held in different cities throughout the year and are free to attend. The first is in Manchester on 6 February. Visit careersandjobsfair.com. Read more about networking at tinyurl.com/rcn-networking

10 Try before you buy
Arrange an informal visit or shadowing. It's so important to see if the role is one that will suit you, your values and strengths. Visit tinyurl.com/rcn-informal-visits for advice on how to go about it.

rcn.org.uk/careers

Torn but determined

For the first time in the 103-year history of the RCN, members have been on strike. Nursing staff in Northern Ireland talk about how it felt to be on the picket line last month

“It’s cold, wet and windy, but we’re determined to see this to the bitter end. The public support has been amazing. It’s humbling to know how much support we have. Nursing staff in Northern Ireland have had enough of being treated differently from our colleagues in the rest of the UK. Ministers in Northern Ireland need to get back into government and sort this mess out.”

Dennis Greer



“
This is the saddest day of my career



“As I listened to the six o’clock news on my drive to work on the day of the strike, I cried. I never thought we’d get to this point. I felt devastated, but we’ve been left with no other choice.

“Unsafe staffing levels are having such a detrimental impact on patient care and nursing staff. We feel totally disheartened and it’s getting worse.

“We know staffing issues can’t be solved overnight – but there’s nothing happening about the concerns we’ve raised. We all just want to provide quality care for our patients.”

Lyndsay Thomson



“After almost 30 years in nursing I have seen some of the most heart-breaking things you could imagine and cried many tears. I can honestly say this is the saddest day of my career.”

Roisin Devlin

“
It’s just unbearable to work in these conditions

“I haven’t slept, I feel sick, but we are doing this for our patients. We have to be heard – nobody’s listening to us. This has been going on for years now and I just can’t tolerate it.

“After 41 years of nursing, at the top of band 5, I’m worth £14.99 an hour. We are prepared to take further action if we need to. It’s just unbearable to work in these conditions.

“Please, please, politicians, listen to us as nurses. We can’t go on like this.”

Eleanor McWilliams



10 FEATURES

Knife crime: how nursing can help stop the cycle of violence

Specialist nurse Dorcas Gwata explains the potential for nurses to prevent stabbings and help turn young lives around



This time last year, on 8 January, 14-year-old Jaden Moodie was knocked off his moped in East London, set upon by four youths and stabbed nine times. The fatal attack lasted seven seconds.

Known to police, Jaden had been dealing drugs for a gang called the Beaumont Crew. His convicted killer, 19-year-old Ayoub Majdouline, had been acting for a rival gang.

The story is tragic but all too common. Latest stats show knife crime offences are at a record high, up 7% to just over 44,000 in the 12 months to the end of June 2019.

Though Jaden's murder was senseless, a deeper look into his and his attacker's backgrounds shows they were arguably failed by a society not set up to support them when they needed help most.

Ayoub was officially designated a "modern slave" by the National Crime Agency in 2018 amid concerns he was being groomed by more sophisticated adult offenders. His father, also a drug dealer, died in 2015 after being stabbed in his flat, which was then set on fire.

Jaden was vulnerable too. Excluded from school multiple times, he was moved from Nottingham to London in an attempt by his family to get him away from trouble. These factors, RCN member Dorcas Gwata believes, play into the cycle of violence which is devastating thousands of families.

When asked what she feels is responsible for the spike in stabbings, she lists school exclusions, lack of mental health support and social media as key issues.

“
A post on social media can be an invitation to war

“We know young people affected by knife crime suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder,” she says. “They're anxious and more likely to use drugs. If their mental health trauma is not addressed, they're also more likely to continue carrying knives and be involved in further violence.”

“News also travels fast online. If you're angry with somebody and want to humiliate them, you can do that very quickly on social media. For someone with no emotional buffer, a social media post can be an invitation to war. Combine fast information with impulsive behaviours, and life becomes very dangerous for these young people.”

Dorcas is speaking from experience. As a specialist mental health nurse in Westminster's Integrated Gangs Unit, she works alongside the police, social services, youth workers and former gang members to reach out to young people affected by knife crime.

Her aim is to create a safe space for young people to talk, encourage them out of drug dealing and into employment. In the face of austerity, however, the unit is facing an uphill struggle.

“There's a direct link between service cuts, social inequality and violent crime,” says Dorcas. “Many young people I work with come from refugee families who have fled Syria, Somalia, Congo or Iraq to seek safety in the UK. Their parents are often dealing with

pre-migratory trauma, while trying to adjust to life here in the UK. Tough choices have to be made and children can be left to find their own path. When there's hard austerity, the vulnerable suffer most."

For every young person involved in knife crime, there's a story that explains their situation, Dorcas believes. Turning lives around is about understanding the full spectrum of their experience and adapting support to them.

"Mainstream services aren't designed for these young people," says Dorcas. "Safety is a real concern for them so going from postcode A to postcode B to attend an appointment, or go to school, can be an issue. We must mould ourselves around them and be innovative to reach out.

Adapting services

"For me, it means adjusting my working hours, meeting them where they want and using WhatsApp to set things up. I align my interventions to what they respond to, so just talking a lot of the time, as many of these kids can't read or write well.

"My questions cover what you'd usually expect in clinic. The conversation goes something like this: How are you sleeping? I'm not sleeping. Why are you not sleeping? Because I'm scared. Why are you scared? Because my mate was stabbed last week, and they posted on social media to say I'm next.

"So, these young people are very open, when we are open. They're just children looking for you to understand them. They want to be able to trust you and get reassurance that they're going to be OK."

Dorcas's unit has had success, providing interventions at the right time, and steering young people onto a different track. But

the service is stretched, and her role is unique. There needs to be more multi-agency units across the UK, making the most of mental health nurses who can bring specialist skills to help prevent violent crime, Dorcas insists.

"We have a lot of work to do to scale-up these services," she says. "I believe I'm the only nurse in the country doing this sort of work. It's not enough. We need to keep young people safe in other cities too. I want what works for London to work for every child in the UK."

Having said that, Dorcas admits her role requires a sophisticated understanding of cultural issues and can be difficult to deal with.

"There's some graphic and unsettling stuff that you witness," she says. "Seeing a young person with a stab or gunshot wound can feel uncomfortable. Supporting someone paralysed by fear, equally so. And being with a mother, who is relieved one son is still alive but worried about the next, can rock you to the core.

"That's why it's so important for staff working with violence and trauma to have close clinical supervision, reflective practice and opportunities to step away from the frontline. They must have chance to focus on their personal and professional development as well as get support to process what they've been through. Team development is also crucial, so I'm very grateful to my manager who understands the strength and importance of teamwork, as well as my clinical supervisor who is always looking out for me.

"I'm grateful too for the young people I work with. Their vulnerability and resilience push me on. And I sleep better knowing that I'm part of change, that I'm doing something about it. When finally, you give a young person enough encouragement, support

“

I sleep better knowing that I'm part of change

and confidence to enrol in college when they had previously been housebound for four months crippled with fear, that's the difference you're making. That's what I do the job for."

Dorcas is a Mary Seacole award scholar who has recently completed research into improving mental health interventions for young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds affected by gang culture. She is due to publish a report of her findings soon.

Dorcas leaves her current role this month but will continue to work with the RCN to help identify solutions to how nursing can help stop the cycle of violent youth crime. She is one of 17 case studies in an RCN report which demonstrates how nursing helps to achieve the United Nations sustainable development goals. This is being published as part of celebrations for International Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

Words by Kim Scott.
Picture of Dorcas by Gareth Harmer



Dorcas Gwata

Could you be part of the conversation?

We're keen to hear from members involved in work to prevent youth violence and knife crime. It's to help us get a better understanding of the issues in different parts of the UK so we can lobby the government to invest in preventative services. This follows an emergency resolution at RCN Congress last year, in which members voted in favour of campaigning on the issue. To get involved email wendy.irwin@rcn.org.uk

12 FEATURES

Inspiring the next generation

Six months since the official launch of the RCN Prince of Wales nursing cadet scheme, we speak to Luke, a nursing cadet who has his sights firmly set on a career in mental health nursing



Luke's nursing cadet cohort. He is pictured on the back row, right

Why this scheme?

I entered a first aid competition in army cadets which got me interested in health care, nursing, and patient care. I thought this was a great opportunity to find out more and get practical experience.

Is being a nursing cadet a full-time role?

No. I still go to school. I'm in my final year (upper sixth) and am studying health and social care, 3D design and drama – through the Welsh Baccalaureate scheme. I also still attend cadet meetings twice a week where, as a member of the senior section, holding the rank of sergeant major, I lead meetings and help younger cadets develop their skills.

What have you learned about on the nursing cadet scheme so far?

Since last March, when I started, I've learned about manual

handling, infection control, communications, leadership skills and teamworking. My clinical placements have shown me the importance of being friendly but professional.

How has the course helped you make career choices?

I had to read about roles as part of my coursework so that's helped me understand what's out there and the kind of role I want. Next year I want to go to Cardiff University to train to be a mental health nurse. I really like the idea of working with patients to help them overcome their mental health problems. I feel this course has given me a really good foundation for the rest of my nursing studies and career.

What kind of reaction have you had from nursing staff and patients?

Very positive. They see the red branded T-shirt I wear and



My clinical placements have shown me the importance of being friendly but professional

like the fact that the younger generation is interested in this kind of work.

What's the main thing you've learned?

I've developed a respect for everyone working in health care. I can see how hard they all work.

Would you recommend the course to other cadets?

Absolutely. The RCN provides such a welcoming environment and you're treated with respect. I tell others to give it a go because it's an opportunity to develop your knowledge and find out which way you want to take your career in health care.

🔗 Find out more at rcn.org.uk/nursing-cadets

How does the scheme work?

The RCN and army cadet instructors work together to give young members of uniformed organisations an introduction to potential careers in nursing and other health care professions. Supported by HRH The Prince of Wales, the scheme aims to develop and prepare cadets for life and to support them towards employment in nursing.

The scheme involves 105 hours of guided experiential learning. This includes learning modules and a clinical observational placement. At the end of the scheme cadets submit a portfolio of reflection and are awarded a completion certificate. They're then supported to take decisions on next steps, which can include a level 2 or 3 related diploma.

The pilot is currently running in Wales in conjunction with the Army Cadet Force Wales. As part of this pilot, army cadets in Wales are offered the guarantee of an interview to be a bank health care support worker. A second pilot has now started in Wales and discussions are underway for a wider UK rollout.

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Social solution

General practice nurse manager Joyce Pickering has created a new model for social prescribing that encourages patients with long-term conditions to improve their wellbeing



“Patients have said they feel positive, they’re more motivated and have more energy,” says Joyce Pickering, nurse manager at Cricketfield Surgery in Devon.

Following an RCN leadership course in 2018, Joyce, a member of the General Practice Nursing Forum, created a programme for her patients that’s had spectacular results. Alongside improved wellbeing, there have been reductions in blood pressure, blood glucose levels, weight and alcohol consumption.

What’s the secret behind the results? Social prescribing.

It’s a holistic approach, addressing mental and social needs that can have an impact on physical ailments, particularly for people with long-term conditions. Social prescribing often involves referring a patient to a link worker, who then connects them to groups, services and information. But in Joyce’s experience, people already struggling to make lifestyle

changes are unlikely to attend external appointments. “For some patients it’s fear of the unknown,” she explains. “They get anxious if they’ve got to meet other people, or they don’t have transport to get there.”

Joyce decided to create a practice-based model of social prescribing, where health care assistant Sharon Allison leads sessions at the GP surgery one day a week. Joyce and Sharon both completed health coaching and created a “de-medicalised” space for appointments, with sofas, cushions and pictures.

“We weren’t asking patients to go to a strange place with people they hadn’t met before,” says Joyce. “That’s one of the reasons why this has been successful. Our DNA (did not attend) rate is very low and in the first three months we saw 48 patients, many of them multiple times.”

Rather than the standard 10-minute appointment, patients

“

Patients feel in control and motivated

are booked in for half an hour, giving them a chance to open up. Each person is offered 12 weekly appointments.

So far, Joyce and the team have focused on people experiencing low mood. Some were anxious, feeling overwhelmed after cancer treatment, or struggling to manage their weight or diabetes.

Other cases forced them to think outside the box: “We had somebody absolutely distraught that her pet had died. She was an elderly lady, her husband had died a few years before and when their pet died, that was a massive thing for her. Sharon found pet bereavement counselling for her.”

Exercise has also helped many people – one woman in her 70s started ballet classes, others began swimming for the first time, while walking football is very popular.

Joyce has big ambitions. “We’re looking at group consultations,” she says. “For example, we’ve got a high percentage of single, young mums, and some become isolated as our area is quite rural. We’ll be looking at them and other groups that may benefit from social prescribing.”

🕒 Find the GP Nursing Forum and start conversations about best practice at rcn.org.uk/forums

Words by Rachael Healy

What does the future hold?

The UK government says 60% of clinical commissioning groups currently use social prescribing to help tackle anxiety, mental health problems and dementia. Last year health secretary Matt Hancock promised to recruit 1,000 social prescribing link workers and pledged £5m for a new National Academy for Social Prescribing. The aim is to give 900,000 more patients access to social prescribing by 2021.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Women's Health Forum

Who's the Chair?

Debby Holloway, a nurse consultant in gynaecology, has been Chair of the forum for nine years.

Recent highlights?

The forum has produced publications on menopause, termination of pregnancy, menstrual wellbeing, female genital mutilation (see below) and more. "Our pocket guides are particularly popular," says Debby. "I also loved helping to develop the RCN *Wandering Womb* exhibition, where we had a chance to highlight women's health to other nursing staff and to the public, showing the progress that's been made since the 19th century."

What's coming up?

Following a successful and over-subscribed women's health conference in 2019, the forum is planning another for this year. They're also looking to update and combine their three women's health pocket guides

into one. They will continue to work with the Royal College of GPs to help promote women's health in general practice, and aim to keep lobbying government to act on issues around menopause and menstruation.

Why join?

"Women's health spans so much – from cancer to neuro-gynae, primary and secondary care – so it can be hard to keep up," Debby says. "The forum helps give you a good overview of everything happening in women's health. We now have more than 1,000 members of our Facebook group and there's always someone to help when you need advice on job descriptions, setting up clinics, best practice or anything else."

Join the Women's Health Forum at rcn.org.uk/forums

Find them at [facebook.com/groups/RCNWomensHealthForum](https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNWomensHealthForum) and on Twitter [@RCNWomensHealth](https://twitter.com/RCNWomensHealth)

WHAT I'M THINKING



Clare Mechan General Practice Nursing Forum

Nearly 4.5 million women are invited for cervical screening every year, but around 18% won't attend. That's why Cervical Cancer Prevention Week (20-26 January) is still so important.

At my practice, we have our nursing staff trained in cervical smear testing, and display information in waiting rooms. Yet our attendance data for cervical smears was below the national target.

We decided to try something new – an evening focused on women's health. The night was run by women, for women. Around 18 women attended the first night, including four who said they wouldn't have usually made an appointment.

After the success of the first event, we made it monthly. We've held a women's health evening in each of the past five months and plan to do so for at least a year.

One woman in her mid-30s had never attended a smear before. She sat in her car outside the surgery for a long time, but when she was ready, she was able to walk straight in and had a cervical screening done for the first time.

We now see between 18 and 22 women each month in this dedicated clinic, and have already seen an increase in our overall cervical screening numbers.

tinyurl.com/smear-for-smear



Updated FGM guidance

We've recently published updated guidance on female genital mutilation (FGM) with help from experts from the Women's Health Forum. The clinical professional resource aims to raise awareness of FGM among nursing staff so victims living in the UK can be better supported.

It stresses that FGM is an illegal form of child abuse and that the hidden nature of the crime raises serious concerns around safeguarding. It says it's vital that nursing staff who come into contact with women, children and families from communities that practise FGM have adequate knowledge and understanding of the issues in order to respond appropriately and act within legal frameworks.

Ruth Bailey from the forum supported this fourth edition of the guidance. "We wanted to provide insight and



understanding of the socio-cultural, historical, legal and health issues surrounding the practice," she says. "We also outline the legal and professional role of nurses and midwives, not least the mandatory duty to report. Raising awareness is primarily about protecting and supporting girls and women."

Download the resource at rcn.org.uk/publications (007 833)

16 EVENTS

For details of more events visit the region and country pages of the RCN website or go to rcn.org.uk/events

London

Managing pain in older people

26 February

RCN HQ

20 Cavendish Square

London W1G 0RN

If you're a nursing professional responsible for identifying, assessing and managing the pain of older people with complex medical needs, this workshop is for you.

Delivered by the RCN Pain and Palliative Care Forum, this informative event will explore common causes of pain in older people and give practical advice and guidance.

Forum Chair Felicia Cox says: "This workshop aims to raise awareness of

the impact of unrelieved pain on older people. It will provide those attending with an understanding of the physiology, expression and assessment of pain; and the importance of documenting the effect of any interventions within care records. It will also showcase non-pharmacological and pharmacological treatments and look at evidence on the use of validated assessment tools for specific patient populations. This event is particularly useful for nursing professionals working in primary care, residential and nursing home settings."

The workshop will be led by experts in the field of pain management in older people including Dr Julie Gregory, a former nurse educator who has developed a pain assessment tool for older people with cognitive impairment.



To book visit tinyurl.com/rcn-pain-workshop or call 02920 546 460.

Wales

Learning about leadership

30 January

National Botanic Garden of Wales

Llanarthne

Carmarthenshire SA32 8HN

Aimed at nursing staff and students working in any sector, this afternoon seminar aims to raise awareness of leadership in health care and highlight opportunities to make a difference in the workplace. Discussions will explore what leadership is, what sort of leader you are, the different types of leadership style, and the importance of resilience in health care leadership.

The closing date for applications is Thursday 16 January.

Visit tinyurl.com/rcn-wales-leadership or call 02920 546 460 to book.



Warrington

Tackling workplace bullying

30 January

The Engine Rooms

Birchwood Park

Warrington WA3 6YN

Bullying and harassment in the workplace is a growing issue in health and social care with a record number of incidents reported in the NHS in recent times. With advice and information from a range of health care practitioners, academics and legal experts, this free conference will explore how bullying affects both staff and patients; ways to create a healthy, inclusive and compassionate culture; how to manage and work with difficult behaviours; and provide legal updates.

To book visit rcn.org.uk/bullying-2020 or call 02920 546 460.

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www.gov.gg/alderneynursing



Treating young hearts

Meet Cath Renwick, the UK's first consultant nurse in paediatric electrophysiology and inherited cardiac conditions

When asked what advice she would give to nurses starting out, without hesitation Cath Renwick says it is important to seize every chance to boost your skills through further study.

Cath has become the UK's first consultant nurse in paediatric electrophysiology and inherited cardiac conditions, a post funded by The Ben Williams Trust.

She has worked at the Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Foundation Trust for 20 years, where she has led the paediatric inherited cardiac conditions and electrophysiology service for the past four years.

Not a natural academic

Yet Cath didn't always consider herself student material. "I did Project 2000 training instead of doing a degree," she says. "Back then, I didn't think I was academically good enough to get through a degree."

At school, Cath knew she wanted to work with children, so she did a work experience placement in a nursery. "I enjoyed it but felt I wouldn't be able to progress far with it," she says.

Aged 21, she decided to train as a children's nurse, securing a place at Thames Valley University (now the University of West London), based in Ealing.



She then joined the Royal Brompton Hospital, where her interest in arrhythmias began while she was working on the intensive care unit. While there, she met consultant paediatric electrophysiologist and divisional director of children's cardiac services Jan Till, an international expert in this field.

"I was in awe of Dr Till," says Cath. "She was a female cardiologist among a lot of men working in this highly specialist area and that was amazing. She has been a fantastic role model."

In 2004, Cath became a cardiac liaison nurse, further developing

her interest in arrhythmias and becoming the link for arrhythmias in the cardiac nurse specialist team.

"I worked closely with Dr Till in clinics, learning as much as I possibly could."

A dedicated nurse post

Then in 2008, The Ben Williams Trust offered to fund the post of a nurse dedicated to children's arrhythmias. "Ben Williams sadly died from an inherited heart condition in 2006 and his parents wanted to do something in his memory," says Cath. "The charity raised the funds to support a dedicated nurse."

Cath has run a nurse-led clinic and been a nurse prescriber for the past 10 years. In her new role she will lead new research and educate other staff in this relatively new field.

"We're hoping we'll be able to develop a science programme supporting nurses through any research they are doing and assisting any who want to have an academic clinical career in the longer term," she says.

Once she can settle on a research topic, Cath plans to apply to do a PhD. "I have a different idea every week. It may be something around quality of life for teenagers with inherited conditions. There are so many interesting areas I could choose."



There are so many interesting areas to research

📍 The Ben Williams Trust supports children with arrhythmias and their families. Visit benwilliamstrust.org.uk

Words by Anne Horner



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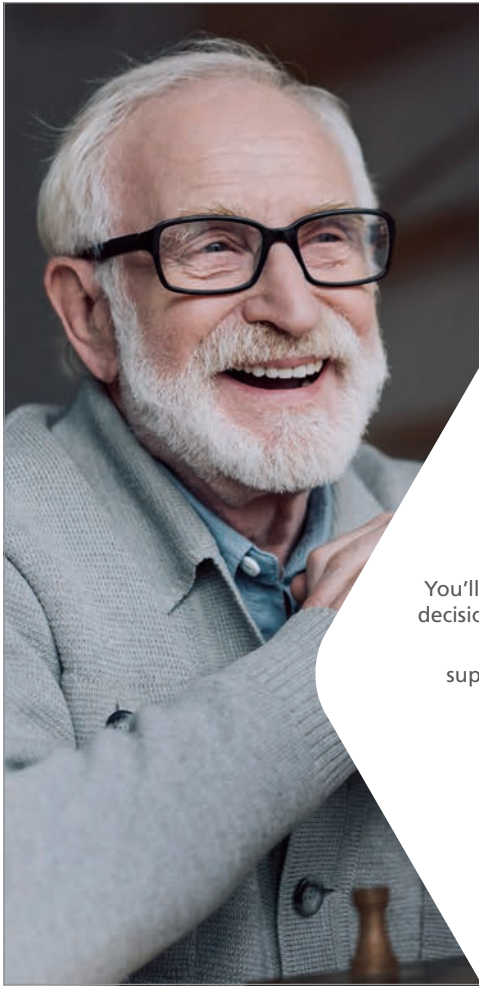
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JAN - 4th

LONDON KENSINGTON
JAN - 8th, 10th, 11th, 15th, 17th, 18th, 24th, 25th, 29th, 31st

LONDON EUSTON
JAN - 6th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 17th, 18th, 20th, 24th, 25th, 27th, 30th

LONDON VICTORIA
JAN - 2nd, 7th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 17th, 18th, 20th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, 27th, 31st

LONDON STRATFORD
JAN - 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st

LONDON WATERLOO
JAN - 7th, 10th, 11th, 14th, 17th, 18th, 21st, 24th, 25th, 28th, 31st

CROYDON
JAN - 7th, 14th

READING
JAN - 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

REIGATE
JAN - 9th, 29th

LUTON
JAN - 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

OXFORD
JAN - 8th, 22nd

BIRMINGHAM
JAN - 3rd, 4th, 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 20th, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 27th, 30th, 31st

COVENTRY
JAN - 15th, 28th

LEICESTER
JAN - 8th, 22nd

BRISTOL
JAN - 7th, 9th, 14th, 16th, 21st, 28th, 30th

CARDIFF
JAN - 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

EXETER
JAN - 2nd, 23rd

PLYMOUTH
JAN - 9th, 23rd

SOUTHAMPTON
JAN - 6th, 14th, 20th, 28th

PORTSMOUTH
JAN - 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th

BOURNEMOUTH
JAN - 8th, 22nd

BRIGHTON
JAN - 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th

MAIDSTONE
JAN - 9th, 15th, 16th, 23rd, 30th

MILTON KEYNES
JAN - 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th

COLCHESTER
JAN - 6th, 27th

CHELMSFORD
JAN - 8th, 22nd

HUNTINGDON
JAN - 10th, 24th

NORWICH
JAN - 6th, 9th, 23rd

NORTHAMPTON
JAN - 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th

PETERBOROUGH
JAN - 8th, 22nd

DERBY
JAN - 15th, 29th

NOTTINGHAM
JAN - 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th

SHEFFIELD
JAN - 16th, 23rd, 30th

LEEDS
JAN - 8th, 10th, 11th, 15th, 17th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, 29th, 31st

LIVERPOOL
JAN - 7th, 14th, 28th

MANCHESTER
JAN - 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 17th, 18th, 20th, 24th, 25th, 27th, 31st

BRADFORD
JAN - 3rd, 17th

PRESTON
JAN - 8th, 22nd

NEWCASTLE
JAN - 8th, 15th, 22nd

HULL
JAN - 10th, 24th

GLASGOW
JAN - 3rd, 20th

EDINBURGH
JAN - 6th, 21st

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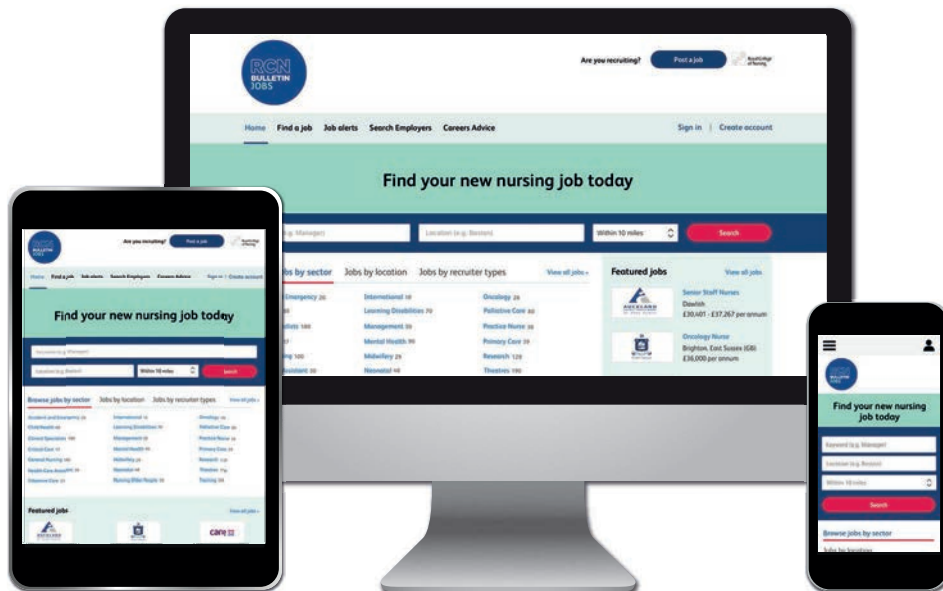
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