



RCN
STUDENTS



Royal College
of Nursing

SPRING/SUMMER 2021
[RCN.ORG.UK/STUDENTS MAG](https://www.rcn.org.uk/studentsmag)

PEOPLE

Student Instagram sensation shares her story

CLINICAL

Suspect sepsis?
Speak up

WELLBEING

The benefits of journal writing

**'IT'S MADE US
STRONGER'**

REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER



Royal College
of Nursing

RCN Starting Out

RCN Starting Out is an exclusive online resource for nursing students and newly registered nurses. It provides the latest knowledge, expertise and support, all in one place.

Whether you're about to start your degree, already studying, or recently started your nursing career, **RCN Starting Out** will support your nursing journey. It allows you to make the most of your RCN membership and can be saved directly on your phone like an app or used as part of the RCN website.

What you can do on **RCN Starting Out**:

- **Library journal search** – use this function to search for thousands of nursing journals, resources and e-books.
- **Subject guides** – explore the wide collection of library subject guides on key nursing topics.
- **Nursing essentials crib cards** – read our new online reference guide with the latest information and support.
- **Students magazine** – access the latest issue of the magazine as well as past features.
- **Events** – take a look at our upcoming events, with a range of live streams, webinars and virtual events.
- **Access MyRCN** – keep all your details up to date so you never miss out on important news.
- **Your branch** – view information on your RCN branch and how to get in touch.



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Story to tell?

If you've got a story to share, email studentsmagazine@rcn.org.uk
Did you know *RCN Students* is online?
Go to rcn.org.uk/studentmag

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WELCOME

Image by Ian Southerin

Proud to represent you

The way you've faced the challenges presented by the pandemic and the way you continue to try your best makes me feel so proud to represent you. You are all incredible.

As your students committee, we'd like to encourage you to get in touch and get more involved with the RCN. It's more important than ever. You can find out who represents you in your region or country on the back page of this issue. We're about to enter a new phase of RCN campaigning for fair pay, and it's vital you're part of our efforts. Visit rcn.org.uk/campaigns for the latest campaign information and see page 4 for ways to get involved.

I'd like to leave you with a little mantra I find relates strongly to the nursing journey: accept the lack of confidence and fear of failure and do it anyway. We overcome so much throughout our time as students and in our careers. Every day, we prove our biggest critic – ourselves – wrong. Keep going.

I really hope you enjoy this issue.

Heather Massie

Chair, RCN Students Committee
Student member, RCN Trade Union Committee



This issue of *RCN Students* went to press on 6 May. Find the latest RCN advice and information at rcn.org.uk

Use your voice to demand more for nursing

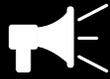
It's never been more important to get involved with the RCN's campaigns to help drive positive change for the profession.

Our Fair Pay for Nursing campaign aims to secure a 12.5% pay increase for nursing staff on Agenda for Change contracts as part of a one-year deal that applies equally

to all bands. We'll be consulting NHS staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland this summer on what pay deal the UK government proposes. A similar consultation in Scotland closed as *RCN Students* went to press.

Find the latest information at rcn.org.uk and help us by doing the three simple things below.

STAY ACTIVE



Download campaign posters and use our materials to talk to your friends and family about the importance of #FairPayForNursing at rcn.org.uk/fairpay

STAY IN TOUCH



Make sure your contact details are up to date, especially your university and workplace, if relevant, so we can get in touch. my.rcn.org.uk

STAY ENGAGED



Become an e-campaigner to receive campaign updates and ideas for easy online actions to take at rcn.org.uk/become-an-e-campaigner

'Don't get angry, get organised'

We're offering RCN members free training to empower them to be forces for change in their universities, workplaces and communities.

Professional standards, pay, staffing levels, employment rights, workplace safety or any other issue we face – together, we can make real impact.

"We're really keen for student members to get involved in the RCN's new Organising for Change initiative", says RCN Students Committee Chair Heather Massie. "We are so much stronger together. Please keep an eye on the RCN's and RCN Students' social media pages for further information."

Visit rcn.org.uk/organising

COVID-19: supporting you

Got a question about COVID-19 and how it affects you?

See our online advice for all the latest information on issues relating to the pandemic at rcn.org.uk/covid-19-advice

Our guidance is being continually updated but if you can't find what you're looking for, you can contact the advice team online at rcn.org.uk/get-help or call 0345 772 6100.

As an RCN member, don't forget you also have access to free, confidential support and assistance to help you deal

with any challenging, emotional issues you may face whether work-related or personal via the RCN Counselling Service.

Visit rcn.org.uk/counselling



Elections ahead

Nominations will open this September for the election of new members to the RCN Students Committee representing students in Eastern, East Midlands, Northern and South West regions, and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. If you're based in one of these countries or regions, and are not due to qualify before July 2022, now is the time to start considering if this could be the next step in your journey as an RCN student. Becoming a committee member is a great way to learn new skills and get a wide range of experience, as well as enhance your knowledge of key nursing issues. Keep an eye out for further information at rcn.org.uk/elections

RCN SHOP

Looking for a nursing-themed gift to celebrate loved ones, inspire the little ones, or find the perfect thank you for a colleague? Head over to the RCN Shop at shop.rcn.org.uk. Check out our new "I love nursing" and "nursing rocks" ranges, as well as our popular RCN merchandise. As an RCN member, you'll get an exclusive 15% off all non-sale items – just add the discount code RCNMEMBER at the checkout.

TOP FIVE

Recently released resources

- Critical care programme**
Resources to support an intro to critical care: rcn.org.uk/introducing-critical-care
- The role of the link nurse in infection prevention and control**
Developing a link nurse framework: rcn.org.uk/publications (code 009595)
- Best practice for modern ward rounds**
How nursing staff can help ensure person-centred care: rcn.org.uk/publications (code 009 568)
- First steps**
Updated learning resource for nursing support workers: rcn.org.uk/firststeps
- COVID-19 vaccination FAQs**
All you need to know in one place: rcn.org.uk/covid-19-vaccination

UPCOMING EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

26 MAY

Songwriting session as part of RCN Library wellbeing events series

11 JUNE

Writing for publication with the Royal Literary Fund

9-10 JUNE

International Mental Health Nursing Research Conference

7-9 SEPTEMBER

RCN International Nursing Research Conference

18-20 SEPTEMBER

RCN Congress



Find details of all these events and more at rcn.org.uk/events

NEW STANDARDS FOR SAFE CARE

We've launched ground-breaking nursing workforce standards to outline what's needed to ensure services are properly staffed, safety is prioritised, and nursing professionals are supported to perform their best. Take a look now at rcn.org.uk/nursingworkforcestandards

‘It’s made us stronger’

On the brink of receiving his NMC PIN, Amin Idjer reflects on completing his degree during a year like no other



Image by Stuart Fisher

The last 12 months have taken all of us on a journey through the unknown. It’s been emotional, challenging and extraordinary, but we’ve all got through it in our own way. If anything, it’s been a reminder that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

At the beginning of the pandemic there was a lot of fear, but there was also the magic of communities coming together and remembering our shared humanity. There was a feeling that if we all unite together, we can get through any situation – and so that’s what we did.

Nursing staff and students united and had to adapt like

never before. It’s not always been the easiest time to be a nursing student – online lectures, the lack of social interaction, the uncertainty – but I believe it has made us stronger.

It’s obviously been a different experience to what a normal third year would have been like, but all students should be proud – whichever route we chose or was chosen for us by circumstance. We’ve all had to adjust, reset, and make some difficult decisions – whether in our first, second, or third year.

For me, I decided the best thing was to do a paid clinical placement. I was nervous, of course. Would I

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If I could go back and talk to myself, I would say don’t worry, take each day as it comes, and you will overcome every obstacle

be placed on a COVID ward? What if I brought COVID home to my family?

My initial feelings of anxiety turned to excitement when I was placed in the A&E department at the Royal Gwent in Newport, Wales. I’d done some bank shifts at the hospital as a health care support worker, so it was familiar to me. I was relieved to be offered accommodation in the student village so I could help keep my family safe.

The first week was overwhelming. Everything happened so fast in the lead-up, I didn’t have much time

to think of anything, but the minute I moved out it really hit home what lay ahead.

Supporting each other

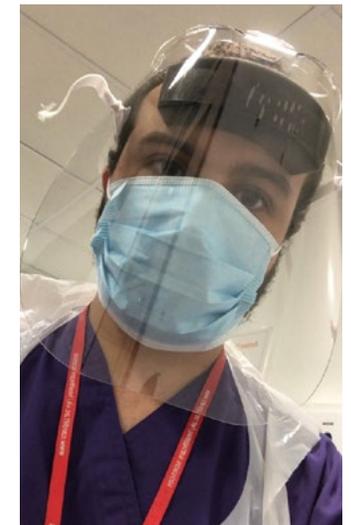
When dealing with the emotional reality of COVID, the important thing for me has always been to keep talking it out with friends and family. Looking after our mental health is so important and there is still a lot to process about the last year.

Living with other students was great because we were all in the same boat. After placement, we’d usually have dinner together and discuss our day. If there was anything that was getting us down, we would support one another and do things to help pick each other up. It felt like sharing a load.

Despite the challenges, there have also been many positives of being a student nurse during these times. I picked up so many new skills quickly and there have been a lot of opportunities to learn. We’ve had to find ways to pull together and deal with the stress and I feel a lot more resilient as a result.

Feeling part of a team at the hospital was a high point for me, and being there for patients who were struggling, unable to have any visitors – it meant a lot to be that person who could be there for them in some of their most vulnerable moments. Nothing can replace family, but at least it was something.

If I could go back and talk to myself at the beginning of my third year – I would say don’t worry, take each day as it comes, and you will overcome every obstacle. It will be worth it.



Your wellbeing

Now, more than ever, is the time to make sure that you are looking after yourself. Take a look at the RCN’s subject guide on wellbeing, self-care and resilience at rcn.org.uk/wellbeing

Why not share your experiences with *RCN Students*? Read our tips on writing for publication at rcn.org.uk/writing-for-publication

From 15-hour shifts to £41k

How one student's viral video has helped fund her nursing degree



Images by Steve Baker

Naana Aisha's dream to become a nurse has involved hard choices. After being told she couldn't get a student loan because of a historic visa issue, she worked flat-out as a carer for a year to self-fund her nursing degree.

Then, upon starting her course last October, she moved into her dad's flat-share to save on rent, sleeping on the sofa and using the dining room table to study.

Meanwhile, she continued to work 15-hour shifts three times a week to afford the fees. "It was a choice between that or not going to university," she says. "I chose nursing."

What got Naana Aisha through those tough times was the hope that things would get easier in her third year when she believed she'd become eligible for financial support. "I just wanted to be like a normal nursing student, having a

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I just had to say what I was feeling

chance to focus on my studies," she says. "When you have to save £1,000 a month to pay university fees, you just do what you have to do to get by."

But a spanner was thrown into the works in March when Naana Aisha discovered that,

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I have been given a chance by everyone

in fact, she would have to self-fund the full three years of her degree. She says she'd been misinformed by student finance officials previously and that the news left her "broken".

Breaking point

"It was like all that hard work had been for nothing. I felt so let down and emotional. I had tried so hard to help myself but all I could see was how much more money I would have to save. I was at breaking point.

"I don't know what compelled me to do it, but I picked up my phone, hit record, and let it all out. It wasn't rehearsed. I just had to say what I was feeling. I wasn't even asking for money at that stage. Just help. I was so desperate in that moment."

Naana Aisha shared the video on Instagram and within hours it had gone viral. Though her followers are friends and family, the video got picked up by a meme page with millions of followers. It was suggested she set up a GoFundMe page and Naana Aisha reignited one she created previously that had raised about £200.

The response this time was phenomenal. The fundraiser

has received more than 2,700 contributions, with the total amount donated standing at nearly £41,000. Model and actress Cara Delevingne was among those who gave money to the appeal, donating £2,000 with the words: "You are a gift on this planet, and I hope your dreams come true."

"I'm just so overwhelmed and thankful," says Naana Aisha. "You see this sort of thing happen to other people, but I never in a million years thought it would happen to me. I have been given a chance by everyone."

Naana Aisha has already used some of the money as a deposit for student accommodation in Leicester for September. She plans to use the rest on fees and travel costs. "The money means a chance to focus

on my studies," she says. "I can live in the same city as my university, go to the library and spend time with other students without the pressure of having to work all the time.

"If I could give any advice to other nursing students who are struggling, it is to speak out. Don't hold everything in or try to cope with things on your own. It is so hard, and you'll end up getting burnt out. Speak up and you'll be surprised by how many people are willing to help you."



Why couldn't Naana Aisha get financial support?

Naana Aisha grew up in Ghana but has lived in the UK since she was 11. When she turned 18, her father's visa no longer supported her, so she was detained by the Home Office before being granted leave to remain.

Her visa status meant applications for funding were unsuccessful, while an attempt at receiving a university scholarship also failed. She is currently on a rolling visa, which allows her to stay in the UK for two and a half years. She must reapply for this every two and a half years at a cost of more than £2,500 each time for a period of 10 years, after which she can apply to remain indefinitely.

RCN members can get free, confidential advice and support from RCN member support services, covering immigration and welfare issues. Visit rcn.org.uk/mss

Top tips for financial health

We address the common issues raised by students during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

Means testing

Has a family member who assists you with the means-tested element of your funding lost their job or been furloughed? If so, get their current year income assessment recalculated urgently.

How you do this depends on where you live. In England, use your Student Finance England online account. If you're based in Wales visit studentfinancewales.co.uk/parents-and-partners, and if you're in Northern Ireland visit studentfinancenir.co.uk/parents-and-partners. In Scotland, there is no means testing so you don't need to do anything.

Arrange payment breaks

Mortgage payment breaks ended at the end of March but if you need forbearance for credit cards, loans or hire purchase agreements, contact your lender to find out what tailored support is available.

Hardship payments

If you're based in England, Northern Ireland or Wales you can apply for university hardship funds. Get in touch with your school office or the university welfare officer to find out what's available.

If you're in England you can also apply for the NHS Exceptional Support Fund, a grant of up to £3,000 available from NHS bursaries. Nursing and midwifery students in Scotland can apply for the Nursing and Midwifery Discretionary Fund, which is administered by the school office.

Working tax credits

If you're an existing tax credit claimant and your income has reduced by £2,500 or more, get your existing claim reassessed.

If you've earned more than £2,500 than you expected to in this tax year, declare this at your next renewal because you might have been overpaid. You'll be notified by HMRC, and this can be repaid from your ongoing tax credit payments. If you're earning £20,000 or less per year – and are in receipt of the maximum entitlement of tax credits – you can usually do this at the rate of about 10% of your ongoing payment.

Anyone getting working tax credit on 2 March 2021 should also have received a £500 one-off payment on 23 April.

Funding to extend your studies

If your university has agreed that, because of mitigating circumstances, it's important you repeat part of a course or you take a break and go back and study at a later date, the maintenance element of your funding is already available.

You're also automatically entitled to apply for a loan for tuition fees for an additional year beyond your course duration. This can be extended for compelling personal reasons and could include if you've already repeated a year and now, because of COVID, you've had to go back and do part of the course again.

Make sure your university has your up-to-date details and inform the school office if your circumstances change. Often students don't get their funding as their university records haven't been updated so the funding body aren't aware.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is linked to your HMRC records so any income changes should automatically be adjusted.

You don't need to do anything unless you suspect something is wrong. In this case, put a note on your journal to let the Department of Work and Pensions know.

Housing benefit

You must inform the housing benefit department of any increases to your weekly income.

Don't delay – send them your payslips so they can notify you of any overpayment. You'll need to negotiate paying back any overpayments directly with them. Get in touch with the RCN welfare team if you need help with this.

Did you know?

Some students starting and continuing their course from September 2020 may be eligible for additional support from the NHS Learning Support Fund. Find out more at tinyurl.com/4u8emkfm

For more advice, contact the RCN welfare service at welfare.service@rcn.org.uk or make an appointment on 0345 772 6100.

Read more in the RCN Student Money Guide at rcn.org.uk/student-money-guide and at rcn.org.uk/covid-19-and-your-finances

These issues are covered in the RCN's new financial wellbeing webinar for students. Visit rcn.org.uk/financial-wellbeing

Suspect sepsis? Speak up

Nursing students must feel confident and empowered to alert senior colleagues if they think their patient could have sepsis

Sepsis is a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body overreacts to an infection. Although treatable in many cases, the UK Sepsis Trust says at least 48,000 deaths a year in the UK are related to it.

It causes the immune system to go into overdrive, often making the body attack its own tissues and organs. This sparks a series of reactions including widespread inflammation and decreased blood pressure.

As a result, the blood supply to vital organs is reduced. They become starved of oxygen, leading to multiple organ failure and potentially death.

The key to managing sepsis is speed; it needs to be recognised early and treated quickly. This is where nurses, midwives and nursing support workers can make a real difference.

Recognise the signs

Sepsis can be tricky to spot as there are lots of possible symptoms. A patient may be acting confused, slurring their speech or not making sense. They may have blue, pale or blotchy skin, lips or tongue, or a rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it.

The patient may experience difficulty breathing, or be breathing very fast, and often they are mistakenly diagnosed with the flu.

Don't be afraid to alert others

The most important thing to do if you suspect sepsis is to alert a senior health care professional. It doesn't matter what your role may be, it's always best to flag your concerns.

If a patient has symptoms that indicate possible infection, always think "could this be sepsis?" Doing an early warning score such as the National Early Warning Score (NEWS 2) can help. Then you can raise the alarm quickly to a senior colleague and prioritise care so the patient can be treated in a timely manner.



Sepsis is a life-threatening condition

Your placement provider will have local policies and protocols for the early identification and management of patients with sepsis, which you should familiarise yourself with.

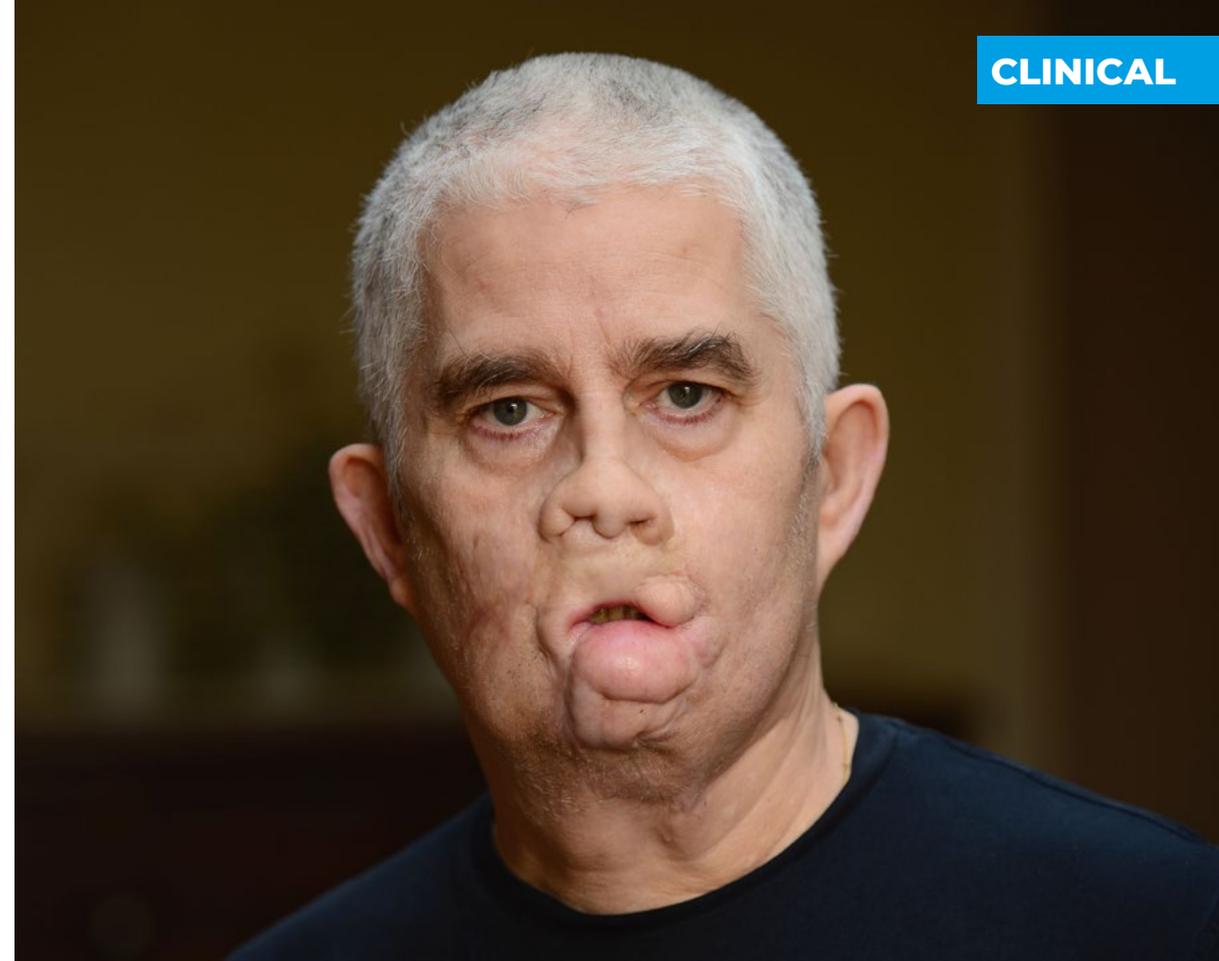
Treatment

Sepsis can be treated with antibiotics, and the sooner they're administered the better potential outcomes for patients.

Depending on the source of infection and symptoms, a patient may require critical care, where they can be closely monitored and treated appropriately. Patients may require a ventilator, vasopressors, and in some cases surgery, to remove the source of sepsis.

Most people make a full recovery from sepsis, but there can be long-term health effects known as post-sepsis syndrome.

Symptoms include feeling very tired and weak, difficulty sleeping, lack of appetite, getting ill more often, anxiety or depression, nightmares or flashbacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



Tom's story

Image of Tom by Steve Baker

I was 38 when I got sepsis. I was in a coma, and four months later I woke up to find I'd had both arms and legs amputated and part of my face removed.

When you're dealing with a patient with sepsis, it's like you're dealing with someone on fire. If you don't get to them fast and apply everything you've got to fix that situation, they're going to die.

If you're not sure what's wrong with the person you're treating, you must ask whether it could be sepsis. Have confidence to stand up to your seniors and advocate for the person in your care.

In my case, a student nurse was concerned about my condition and feared sepsis but didn't speak up.

Beating sepsis, coping with the aftermath and trying to earn enough for my family has been the challenge of my life.

It can be a very brutal and difficult lifestyle, but we've come through it. We've survived and I'm proud of what we've achieved.

Tom Ray spoke at RCN Congress in 2019.

His story of survival has been turned into a film called Starfish, and a book entitled Starfish: One Family's Tale of Triumph After Tragedy

Always think sepsis

The RCN has a wealth of information and links to resources on its website. Visit rcn.org.uk/sepsis

Reflective journal writing: how can it help?

Find out the benefits of writing down your thoughts and how to get started

Reflective journal writing is a way of documenting what you're thinking and feeling at the time that you wrote it and can be a useful tool to help manage stress and anxiety.

Dr Christopher Westoby, author of *The Fear Talking: The True Story of a Young Man and Anxiety*, is a strong believer in the power of stories to educate, improve

understanding and benefit the wellbeing of the storyteller.

We spoke to Chris about the benefits of writing for your mental wellbeing.

Can reflective writing help nursing staff?

Absolutely. Regardless of your background, and wherever you work,

everyone has this universal need to reflect upon their own experiences and one of the best tools we have for that is writing. It is similar to the process of opening the windows to a room and letting some air in.

We all have so many thoughts and memories whirling round our head at any given time – especially in the

current climate. Sometimes the cloud of everything happening at once can be more overwhelming than any one event itself. Reflective journal writing can help with that.

How does it help?

We often struggle to come to terms with whatever it is we've been through unless we take a second and address these things head on.

And while it may not always be an easy thing to do – or a quick fix – by writing what's going on internally, what you're doing is externalising something that has been haunting you or playing on your mind. Once it's out there on the page, it's like you can lay it to rest.

You also now have a choice on what you want to do with it. Are you going to delete it or keep it for yourself? Are you going to let someone else read it?

As you make those decisions, you're taking control of your emotions and the clouds may start to clear.

So, what are the benefits?

The sense of control over your own experiences can be empowering and help relieve any stress or anxiety you're experiencing.

You've let it be acknowledged that what you're feeling is something, it's being validated and

now it's written down, it may no longer feel quite so insurmountable.

Any tips to get started?

My first tip is to use whatever format works best for you – whatever it is that will help get you in the habit of doing it. Don't use handwriting if you'd rather type, and vice versa.

I've worked with students before who have talked about using voice memos. They've just hit record and then they either deleted it or transcribed it depending on what they've found most beneficial.

My second tip is to think of prompts. Maybe ask yourself questions to help get you started – what am I grateful for? What have I found difficult? Perhaps focus on one part of the day – how did I feel after my shift? On the way to work? Going to bed?

Finally, think about setting yourself some restrictions. Try setting a timer on your phone and then keep writing until it goes off. The more restrictions you set, the less daunting writing can be. You might actually find yourself more inspired.

How often should I write?

It's a good thing to try and do every day – even if it's only a few sentences – for as long as you find it useful. I'd suggest giving it a go for two weeks and see how you're finding it.

What if I find it hard writing about myself?

If it seems too difficult writing about yourself, try writing about someone else or something you observed today – perhaps something you noticed on your journey home or through your window.

If you write about something else, you will inevitably find yourself beginning to include elements of yourself.

If you're finding it too emotionally draining to revisit certain memories, remember this writing is your property – you can change what you need to, you can change the details and you can just talk about a small part of it.

The key is to remember that you're in control and it's up to you how you document it.

There are fewer ways to offload to one another at the moment, to distract ourselves and to blow off steam, so even if journal writing doesn't work for you, it's worth a try. The benefits might surprise you.

Chris is Programme Director of the Hull Creative Writing MA (Online). His book *The Fear Talking: The True Story of a Young Man and Anxiety* was published in December 2020. He led the RCN's workshop *Time to Write for Yourself* earlier this year.
@ChrisWestoby

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The sense of control over your experiences is empowering



The joys of working with older people

An award-winning internship programme is encouraging nursing students to consider a career in care homes

“In the past, nursing in a care home might have been looked down on and seen as a Cinderella service, but we’re trying to change that,” says Jemma James, who qualified in 2019, after spending much of her final year based in a care home in Durham.

Since taking part in an internship attached to the University of Northumbria, she has continued to support the programme – which involves at least nine care home providers across the North East – giving a presentation at last year’s virtual RCN Congress about her experiences.

“As a nurse in this environment you’re working in a person’s home,” says Jemma. “It’s a totally different power dynamic, compared to working in a hospital. I love being able to have that close personal contact with someone, getting to know them.”

In practice, her internship was split between working in a care home, alongside her mentor, and spending time with specialists based within the NHS and charity sector, where she was able to



Stock image

learn more about strategic decision-making.

“It helped me to understand the practical impact of decisions on issues such as assessment and funding, seeing the whole process from the top down and the bottom up,” says Jemma.

“On the ground, you may think, we need more funding,” she adds. “But when you understand more about how that money is allocated, you can also see the challenges. It informs your thinking, but also gives you the tools to challenge constructively.”

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Holistic nursing starts with making a one-to-one connection

no doctors immediately at hand,” she says. “You’re assessing someone rapidly, triaging and making referrals. The residents are reliant on you and your skills to know exactly what to do to help them.”

In 2019, the programme – believed to be the first of its kind in the country – won a Cavell nursing star award. In response to students’ feedback, a short placement of a couple of weeks is now available to those at the start of their degree too.

“You’re paired with a resident with the aim of helping you to really understand that individual,” explains Jemma.

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Older people’s nursing deserves more respect

“As a first-year student, you may never have been in a care home before or met anyone with dementia, so you can have a very set picture. This challenges your views, breaking down those stereotypes. Holistic nursing starts with making a one-to-one connection.”

Currently working with oncology patients, Jemma sees her future within the care home sector. “I have a vision of care homes

becoming fully nurse-led,” says Jemma, who was shortlisted in the student category of the RCNi Nurse Awards in 2019.

“We need highly-skilled practitioners who can also prescribe, as higher dependency is normal for residents now. I’m trying to gain as many skills as I can, so eventually I’ll be able to give a comprehensive service to people living in a care home.”

The latest internship starts this May. “For the first time, we are including an older people’s stream in the third year, which is very exciting,” says associate professor in adult nursing Dr Juliana Thompson. “Most year three students will have a placement in an area providing care specifically for older people – a care home, hospital ward or community service.”

The university will also be providing practical sessions on a range of topics related to caring for this group of patients, including dementia, delirium, frailty and multi-morbidity.

“Older people’s nursing deserves more attention and respect,” says Jemma, who joined the steering committee of the RCN Older People’s Nursing Forum in January. “We need to shout from the rooftops.”

Join the RCN Older People’s Nursing Forum at rcn.org.uk/forums and find careers information at rcn.org.uk/your-career

'We can roar loudly'

Student ambassadors can play a crucial role in supporting RCN campaigns, say Scott and Gemma

"Part of the student ambassador role is trying to instil the fire and passion you have in fellow students," says Scott Doughty, Vice Chair of the RCN Students Committee.

Scott has been involved in work to develop the RCN student ambassador role, which was launched at the end of 2019. The role descriptor includes a specific section on campaigning, and highlights ways student ambassadors can encourage other student members to get involved in RCN campaigns and ensure their experiences help shape them.

Scott says: "You're not going to make changes straight away. Issues like fair pay and safe staffing affect us as the future nursing workforce. But equally, it's about making changes for future students."

"Making sure there is safe staffing so students can have a good quality practice experience or making sure nursing staff are paid fairly so we can have practice assessors and supervisors

on the ward to support us – as students we need to be thinking about these things and what it could mean for the next generation of student nurses."

Gemma Mowbray, a first-year nursing student and RCN student ambassador in Edinburgh, says: "It's important for students to be aware of the issues facing nursing staff. These are things we'll be facing when we're qualified. But we can make a difference now by campaigning and using our voice."

Getting connected

Since starting her course in September last year, Gemma has only visited her university's campus once, so having the opportunity to connect with fellow student ambassadors has been important to her. With support from RCN staff, student ambassadors from across Scotland now meet online once a month. "It's a chance to share what we've been doing, discuss ideas and take a collective approach," says Gemma.



For all the latest campaigns information: rcn.org.uk/campaigns

Gemma and Scott both agree that one of the benefits of the student ambassador role is the flexibility to put different ideas into practice.

With the RCN's Fair Pay For Nursing campaign gathering pace, students in Scott's region have decided to produce a video as part of the region's campaigning.

Spreading the word

Scott says: "One of the simplest things any student ambassador or student can do is to share campaign posts on social media. By

sharing it the message multiplies."

Last year, as part of the RCN's Fund Our Future campaign, Scott also contacted his local MP and arranged a meeting. He used the opportunity to discuss both Fund Our Future and the RCN's Fair Pay For Nursing campaign, pointing out that the two are closely linked.

Gemma says that materials from the RCN have helped her spread the word about the pay campaign too. "I've asked students to put up posters on noticeboards during

their clinical placements and we've ordered badges and stickers," she says. "For student ambassadors, your placements are a chance to speak to nursing staff about the RCN's campaigns and learn about their experiences."

Support to succeed

Gemma says that to get the most out of the role, you need to be self-motivated. "You need to go out and make connections," she says. "But there is support too. The role can also open a lot of doors to other opportunities."

Scott says that an online training resource and RCN Student Committee members are also important sources of support to student ambassadors. "I'm really keen on encouraging students to attend their local branch meetings too," he adds. "I feel that sometimes the student voice is being lost at a local level and it offers another way of getting involved."

Scott says: "In some ways we can roar more loudly and have a stronger voice while we are students, and we need student ambassadors to help harness that strength."



Your RCN Students Committee

Representing you



Heather Massie (Chair)
Trade Union Committee



Shaun Williams
Student member of RCN Council
See: rcn.org.uk/shaunwilliams



Kendal Moran
Professional Nursing Committee



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Northern

Country and regional representatives



Rebecca Emmins
Eastern



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Yorkshire & the Humber

What does the committee do?

The RCN Students Committee is led by students for students, and makes the student voice heard on the issues that matter to you.

The committee reports directly to RCN Council – the RCN's governing body. Contact your student committee representative at students@rcn.org.uk