

100 YEARS *of* ACTIVISM

An Activate RCN centenary special

September 2016



Brilliant badges

In the RCN we've relied on badges for years for a range of purposes. Members feel reassured when they can identify RCN activists from their badges. They help identify who we are, what our skills are and what we believe in. And of course at Congress, they are always the 'must have' accessory.



Celebrating you

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As we mark 100 years of our wonderful organisation, it's right that we look at how far we've come and highlight the vital work that RCN activists do.

We are a proud, diverse and successful union. We move with the times and would be unrecognisable to our 34 founding members, who would surely be surprised and delighted to see that we now have so many members and are the biggest nursing union in the UK.

In our centenary year, I'd like to reflect on what it means to be an RCN member. For many it's the support they get from you. When members need someone by their side, you're there to help their professional development and career aspirations; if they're facing disciplinary action or they're working in an unsafe environment, help and support is available from you, our dedicated, hardworking activists.

It doesn't matter what role you hold, whether you're a rep, branch officer or committed member of an RCN forum, I'm continually impressed by how well you work together to support colleagues and improve their practice environments. And by getting it right in the workplace, you ensure nursing staff are able to deliver good quality care.

You're our most valuable asset and you're central to our success. **Without you, there would be no RCN.**

**Janet Davies,
RCN Chief Executive &
General Secretary**



Do you have an activist story to share?

The work of RCN activists needs to be recorded for generations to come. If you would like to share your activist experiences with the RCN archive team, email archives@rcn.org.uk

This newsletter is produced by the Communications Department at the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN.

www.rcn.org.uk

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How times have changed

1916

The College of Nursing Ltd was established on 27 March 1916, with just 34 members. By the end of year one there were 2,553 members.

This took place against the backdrop of World War One.

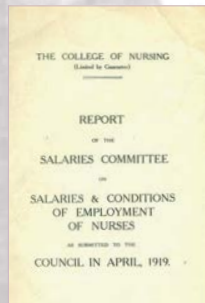


Conscription was introduced in the same year and just months after the formation of the College, the Battle of the Somme started, resulting in the death of more than one million soldiers.

1919

In 1919 the UK passed the Nursing Act of 1919, which provides for registration of nurses.

Trade unionism was seen as a worry for the College when it was targeted at probationers who formed an important part of the nursing workforce.



The College published its first report on salaries and employment conditions, recommending a maximum 48-hour working week for nurses. After objections from members, this was raised to 56 hours.

The College of Nursing moved into 7 Henrietta Street, London. By this time the membership had grown to more than 13,000.

1974

British industry has changed substantially since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) in 1974. Between 1974 and 2015 fatal injuries to employees fell by 86% and reported non-fatal injuries fell by 77% (to 2011/12).



1977

The RCN became a trade union in 1977, following a unanimous vote in 1976.

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 helped to spark a culture change at workplace level.

1979

The College organised protests, demanding 'pay not peanuts' in 1979.

In the late 1970s there were widespread strikes in support of pay demands across the public sector. The RCN was one of the few unions not to strike during the "winter of discontent".



1981

The *Bridge that Gap* campaign ran from November 1981 until September 1982 when 400,000 health workers had salaries below the poverty line. The Government eventually offered a 12% pay rise and established an independent body to review nursing pay.



1920

In 1920 the College *Bulletin* was published. The College *Bulletin* was provided free to members four times a year. It was published until 1926 when it was replaced by the weekly journal *Nursing Times*.

1923

The Sister Tutors' Section was established in 1923. It was the first specialist section set up within the College. Membership was limited to College members in teaching posts. Sections were the forerunners of forums.

1995

In 1995 RCN members voted to amend the constitution to authorise strike action.

2002

The RCN Learning Zone was launched in 2002.

1925

The Student Nurses' Association was established in 1925. The association was affiliated with the College of Nursing Ltd, giving students the social benefits of membership, but they were not allowed to vote on College policy.



2009

The 2009 *Frontline First* campaign identified cuts, waste and innovation in the NHS, highlighting the state of the profession and offering solutions to improve nursing services.

1949

In 1949, the Ward Sisters' Section was established to increase awareness and engage hospital nurses in the work of the College.

1962

The College's first public pay campaign was held in 1962. Nurses' wages had fallen to 60% of the national average salary and public sector salaries had been frozen. The campaign mainly involved writing letters to MPs.

2013

The RCN stewards' portal was launched in 2013.

The portal is continually being reviewed and helps stewards manage their cases in a more effective and efficient manner.

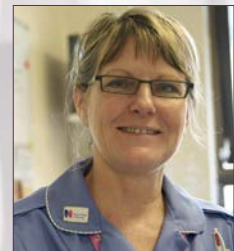
1969

The first meeting of Congress took place in Harrogate in 1969. The annual RCN Congress and Exhibition combined the separate meetings of the College's specialist nursing sections, Council and representative body.

In 1969 the *Raise the Roof* campaign led to the largest single increase in salary in the history of nursing – a rise of 20% in a year.

2016

In 2016, as nursing pay falls 14% behind inflation, work continues to get members a fair deal through the RCN's *Nursing Counts* campaign.



Determined and practical



It may seem a stretch to compare today's hardworking active members to a Dame who was matron-in-chief of the British Red Cross. But as a founder of the College of Nursing, Sarah Swift could be seen as the RCN's first activist.

Like today's activists she was determined and practical. She knew that forming an alliance with influential politician Arthur Stanley was essential if her campaign to establish the College was to garner much-needed political attention.

She wasn't afraid of meeting a challenge head-on either. Campaigning for state registration was not for the fainthearted and the idea of a college for a women's profession must have been unimaginable for many.

While she would probably be shocked at the idea of her beloved College later admitting men into its membership and becoming a union, she would no doubt be pleased that we were able to move with the times and, 100 years on, provide support to more than 430,000 nursing staff.

Sarah lived at a time when suffragettes were making headlines, but many women supported change by less militant methods. She chose a target that she knew was achievable and focused on it with unflinching professional dedication until she got what she wanted.

Fiona Bourne, RCN Archives Operational Manager

In her own words



Dora Frost MBE 1930-2013

Dora Frost, the RCN's first steward, made people sit up and listen. Excerpts from a 2007 interview show her depth of experience and how ahead of her time she was.

Getting recognition

“ Getting nursing recognised nationally was achieved with a great deal of effort and foresight and wisdom and perseverance from nurses who were politically aware at a time when generally within the profession there wasn't a political awareness.”

Getting more members

“ One of the most important things that we had to face on Council during the time that I was on, was the low membership relative to the numbers of trained nurses there were in the UK and how to get them to join the College”

Strike action

“ There was this reluctance to use the ultimate sanction that the trade union has, which is that of withdrawing labour. When I first became involved in the College, I think politically we were rather naïve. I don't think we realised, at first, that we were in a position to influence public opinion”

RCN's first ever press release

“ I think that I did something that nobody had really ever done before which was actually to present something in a positive way, in an ear-catching way, with sound bites.

“ But I am amazed that I ever did it because I was terrified of speaking in public because I knew that I spoke with a regional accent and in those days you did not speak with regional accents.”

After attending her first RCN meeting

“ This College isn't such a dead duck as I thought it was. They're actually talking about things that are of interest to us.”

What to call local reps

“ They wanted to back off this idea of calling them stewards because that was trade union terminology.

“ In the end I actually put the proposal to Council that they be called stewards and it was accepted.”

Lobbying during the 1969 *Raise the Roof* campaign

“ I had the opportunity to lobby Barbara Castle [Secretary of State for Health and Social Services]. The mantra at that time was that pay had to be related to productivity.

“ I pointed out to her that midwives could prove productivity but it was difficult for those of us on the wards to do so, but I did produce figures of our increased turnover. She was very sympathetic to what I was saying.

“ We were doing this with MPs all over the country, and it did make a difference because from that particular government we got one of the best pay hikes I think that we have ever had.”

Support the Rcn in its campaign for

BETTER SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Attend the specially arranged meetings, write to the Press, talk to your M.P.s, put up Rcn posters and stickers and generally promote the campaign by any law-abiding and legitimate means.

Watch the nursing press for announcements!

RAISE THE ROOF!
All Nurses Deserve Fair Pay

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF NURSING AND NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
Victoria Place, London W1P 6JH Tel: 01-585 3244

Becoming a union

“ There was a big debate about the professional side of the College in promoting the art and science of nursing and the trade union side of the College, which was very obviously distasteful to a lot of people.

“ But those of us on the ground knew jolly well what we were up against in terms of the activity particularly of the TUC affiliated unions. They had a very sophisticated machinery, well-trained officers, quite aggressive recruitment techniques and they were out to get the trained nurse component within the trade unions.”

Finding her political home

“ I was intensely interested in nursing and the profession and the wonderful legacy that we had as British nurses and how frail we were really in terms of decibel power, of making ourselves known and heard and actually putting forward our case.

“ Not only for conditions of service, but for things affecting patient care, practices, availability of beds, staff and the like.”

Becoming the RCN Chaplain

“ One of the nice things was Trevor [Clay] offering me, informally, the role of honorary chaplain and being privileged to organise Congress services and to help organise functions and services at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral.”

Today's activists Organising



‘We showed how strong we are’

David McKerr’s proudest moment as a rep happened just a few months ago when the RCN challenged the pay announcement imposed on nursing staff in Northern Ireland.

At the time the RCN said the Northern Ireland Health Minister had blatantly misrepresented the situation in relation to nurses’ pay. The lack of any pay award for nursing staff in Northern Ireland left members feeling devalued, demoralised and disgusted at the total disregard by the Department of Health for the role of the independent pay review body in recommending nurses’ pay.

“We got out there and showed how strong we are,” David says. “Members were incensed. They

felt the health minister had dismissed our concerns. Many contacted the RCN, their reps and the media directly. I’m so proud that members rallied against this. As a result, the health minister reconsidered his position and there was a satisfactory agreement for the following year’s pay award.”

This addressed some of the injustices, according to David.

“The public love nursing staff but goodwill is not enough. It doesn’t pay the bills, we need fair pay too,” he says.

“Through the campaign, we found that many nurses were taking on additional ancillary roles which had been cut such as portering and domestic duties. We’re almost too co-operative and flexible, which can be to the detriment of our own roles. There

are times when we need to put ourselves first.”

Looking forward

David’s passion for being a rep is clear. He believes it’s important to get out there and get to the problems before they become an issue. He’s dedicated and keen to encourage others to get involved and has recently helped recruit 12 new reps.

“Members were incensed”

“The most enjoyable aspect of being a rep is being able to work with frontline staff who are always happy to see

you but can also be ready to challenge and have a good debate – there’s never a dull moment. It’s important that we let our members know what we can do for them and that we’re there for them. You get back what you put in,” he says.

Today's activists Speaking out



Persistence pays off



RCN steward Alex Scott took action to help the lowest paid at his trust

It's pretty serious when you see your colleagues relying on food banks just to get them to the end of the month.

Alex Scott couldn't ignore it. He wanted to provide practical help. "I'd been made aware of the Living Wage Foundation when I'd attended Congress back in 2014," he explains. "Now it was time for action."

Despite being a relatively new steward at the time, Alex raised the issue at his local staffside partnership forum. "I had evidence from my trust's staff survey which showed that staff morale was low and I told them something had to be done," he recalls.

The cost of living has increased massively in the century since the RCN was founded. *Good Housekeeping* has reported that the price of bread now costs 11,000% more than it used to (1p in 1914).

But Alex knew he had to do more. He kept the issue on the agenda each month and wrote to and met with his local MP, asking for his support in four local hospital sites. His MP wrote to the four chief executives asking them to support the introduction of a living wage.

As a result of Alex's persistence the living wage was introduced at Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT) last year. He's now moved on to his latest project and will once again work in partnership with his management colleagues with the aim of accessing Public

Health England's pot of £600 million for healthy workplace initiatives, utilising the RCN's *Healthy Workplaces* toolkit.

Collaborative working

So what's the secret to Alex's success?

Alex points to the way he approaches his union work. "I have an appetite for collaborative working. I enjoy working in partnership with staffside colleagues and here in Northamptonshire we have a great branch team" he explains. "Even difficult situations like disciplinaries can bring positives. My job is to support the process, get to an outcome, and build learning.

Alex was a rep in another union before moving to the RCN and he hasn't looked back. "Now I've got the autonomy I need and can get involved in proper partnership working. I have a huge appetite for

finding solutions – and have a sense of value in what I do."

But he's no pushover. "Just because

I want to work in a non-blame

culture, it doesn't mean I won't ask challenging questions. But it's always best to empathise with people to get win-win situations."

**"Now
it was
time for
action."**

Find out more about the Living Wage Foundation at www.livingwage.org.uk

Today's activists Your centenary words of wisdom

Always carry a tissue with you

Ann does what she can to make members feel comfortable and relaxed

“I go to members, I don't wait for them to come to me. That's why I would always recommend carrying a pack of tissues with you. Sensitive issues can crop up at any time. I've also built up strong relationships with managers, other staff-side colleagues and staff in the HR department. It's so useful for off-the-record chats. I like to take a friendly approach, there's no point in being aggressive.”

RCN steward and branch officer
Ann Thomas



Help members regain their confidence

Ian uses the Union Learn mid-life development review as a starting point in his conversations

“While it may seem obvious that members who have been made redundant may need some help with career planning, I see a much wider need. Some of the members I have spoken to have been redeployed into a different role, others may be returning after a career break, maternity or illness, and doubt whether they possess the skills to manage in a changing service. I give people time and support, to help them be objective about their skills, and develop an action plan to address any problems.”

Ian Thomas, RCN learning rep



Read more about the Union Learn mid-life development review. Visit www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-midlife-development

Be confident and get a voice

As a health care assistant working in a hospice in south Wales, Ceriann Jones originally didn't think she could become an RCN rep

“My rep training has left me more confident and able to look at situations from my perspective as a HCA, but also from a management point of view. I'd recommend becoming an RCN rep to anyone. It's a passion for me and I want to make a difference. Now I have an active role I really feel like I've got a voice.”

**Health care assistant and learning rep
Ceriann Jones**



Remember lone workers

Mitzi Wilson was credited in the recent Suzy Lamplugh National Personal Safety Awards

“As a community nurse you often don't have enough information before a visit and won't know what the situation is until you enter someone's house. Risk assessments must be backed up with robust and effective policies. Mobiles are better than nothing but lone working devices are so much more discreet for those rare occasions when you need them. We should all be embracing these methods and urging employers to invest in protecting lone working staff.”

RCN safety rep Mitzi Wilson



There are so many reasons to be a rep

Tara believes unions can help protect employee rights in a range of workplaces

“I've just applied to be a rep. Improving conditions in our care home is my primary goal. I would like to be a safety rep as I think reducing workplace hazards is an excellent way of ensuring high quality care. I think having a union protecting your rights in the workplace is crucial, particularly in the current climate of stagnant pay.”

Senior carer and new rep Tara Watts



Today's activists Tackling discrimination



See the abilities

After years of dedicated service to your employer, imagine how it feels to be told that you are no longer wanted because you now have a disability. Your skills are ignored and instead everyone seems only able to focus on what you can't do. To make matters worse, you're facing more physical challenges than you've ever faced.

You need to speak to someone who sees your abilities rather than your disability. Someone like RCN steward Claire Drot who believes that everyone has the right to be treated fairly.

“It's the stuff we don't see that concerns me”

When she met a member facing these very circumstances she fought hard to find a solution. “An extended redeployment was the answer for this particular member,” explains Claire. “It meant that the employer kept her experience and many abilities in the trust, just by making a few reasonable adjustments.”

Claire is pragmatic and recognises that jobs won't be able to be found for everyone in this situation but she argues that all considerations should be taken into account. “The rising retirement age means we will see lots more cases like this in the years to come,” she adds.

At Southampton University Foundation Trust, where she works, there's a high proportion of staff recruited from overseas and she's already made significant inroads into ensuring they too receive the fair treatment they deserve. “I worked with our ethnic inclusivity network many years ago and I'm confident that the work we've done on race and ethnic discrimination has been firmly established here.”

Ongoing work

However, Claire acknowledges there may still be work to be done. She wants everyone to be treated fairly and although she hasn't personally witnessed people being discriminated against she knows this doesn't mean that there isn't a problem. “It's the stuff we don't see that concerns me,” she says. “If we can't get it right in the workplace for members, how can we get it right for patients?”

The Equality Act 2010 provides disabled people with protection from discrimination in a range of areas, including employment.

She adds: “I want to be the steward I would want if I needed representation. I'm proud of where I work. We have a proactive staffside committee and a positive management team. We know that by looking after staff, they are better able to look after patients.”

Today's activists Representing



Building confidence

Although it's not been in place for long, staff have already told me how the new process has given them the confidence to return to work sooner. Sickness levels have also decreased, so it's clearly working.

Using the checklist has helped identify other areas for improvement too. In the future we're going to develop new policy around harassment and bullying, and we also have exciting plans for a mediation service.

We've used the toolkit to safeguard funding for staff development, which will

continue to have an impact on retention.

My role as a rep often involves speaking to employers about some incredibly challenging issues.

However, this has been such a positive thing to bring to the table and it's

strengthened the partnership I have with the trust.

Supporting stressed colleagues



Denise McLaughlin, RCN safety rep at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in

Gateshead, explains how she worked with senior management to tackle stress-related sickness using the RCN healthy workplace toolkit

I was immediately supportive of the RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign. But it was only when I took the toolkit to my trust's health and wellbeing steering group meeting that I saw the true value of this project.

Last year staff absence due to stress was becoming a major issue. When a member of staff took time off, they could be absent for up to four weeks

before their manager referred them for additional support.

The toolkit uses a checklist approach to problems, and by following this guide, we developed a fast-track referral process.

It was developed in partnership with staff and employers, and made sure that anyone with a stress-related issue was contacted by our occupational health team within 24 hours.

For me as a rep, this was hugely important. It gave staff the chance to speak to a health care professional and receive advice, information about talking therapies, or support in approaching their GP.

“Staff absence due to stress was becoming a major issue”

Find out more about the Healthy Workplace toolkit at www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace

Fantastic forums



Forum discussion in days gone by

Originally developed to ensure the member voice was heard on specialist nursing issues and promote professional leadership, the RCN forums continue to be central to the work of the College.

Some have come and gone, reflecting changing terminology and ways of working. It wasn't that long ago (2001) that we had forums for "computers in nursing" and "mental handicap nursing".

Back in 1999 the RCN's magazine for stewards, *Newslines*, quoted Sally Thomson, the RCN Nursing Policy and Practice Director.

"The forums are constantly evolving to meet members' needs," she said. "We want to make the forums as effective as possible so they work well for members, and make it easier to share ideas and expertise to build stronger networks across the UK."

New technologies bring rapid improvement and may make us think that everything has changed but some things remain true.

Forums in 2016: Five minutes with Marie Therese Massey QN, Chair of the RCN General Practice Nursing Forum

Why did you get involved with the forum?

I wanted to ensure the voice of my specialty is heard at the highest level.

What does your work as a forum chair involve?

I answer media enquiries, write editorials and attend high profile meetings where I represent the views of general practice nurses. I also spend some time answering online queries from other forum members.

How's the forum's Facebook page working out?

I'm really pleased that we've already got about 400 members signed up. I used to be a

newsletter editor but this new, faster way of communicating is working really well for us.

Any conferences planned?

Not as such. We considered running our own conferences but the competition from larger organisations is just too much. Instead we focus on being guest speakers at bigger events where the audiences are much larger. I'm really pleased that we had our poster on general practice nurse workforce issues accepted at the forthcoming RCN centenary conference and QNI conference.

What's your proudest achievement?

Probably that we've managed to

raise our profile as a forum and people recognise our expertise. We've got more involved with Congress – running fringe events, seconding an item and getting up on the podium and speaking on the issues that matter.

Sounds like hard work?

It is, but I've worked with the forum for many years and I jumped at the chance to get more involved. Of course I couldn't do it without the support of the committee who are brilliant and help me in so many ways.

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/forums

A 21st century council



Chair of RCN Council Michael Brown looks to the future

I'm proud the membership took the hard decision to agree changes that will strengthen the College for future generations.

Altering the role and structure of Council for the first time in nearly 40 years won't be easy.

As a result of the historic vote at the annual general meeting earlier this year, there will be fewer members on Council in the future but more members will be directly elected onto Council committees to make key decisions on behalf of members on our trade union and professional agendas. A smaller, more strategic Council will help make it more accountable and able to make better informed, faster decisions.

Work has now started to make these important and positive changes. I am confident that these will ensure that your views are better represented at the top table and your subscriptions will be spent to best effect.

Dear future member...



Royal College of Nursing
Shaping nursing since 1916

The RCN is inviting you to write about what being active in the RCN in 2016 means to you by emailing your peers of the future. Members are also being asked to write about their experiences of nursing and the RCN.

"Your first-hand accounts will form an important historical record of not just how being an activist and nursing works today, but also the feelings and opinions of the people doing the job," said RCN Centenary Programme Manager Sarah Abley.

A selection of emails will be printed and stored in a sealed box in the RCN archives – with the instruction 'not to be opened until 27 March 2116', - the RCN's 200th anniversary.

Email RCN200@rcn.org.uk by 31 December. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/future-nurses for guidance on writing the emails and for more information.

Now and then



Defence nurses today

As the RCN celebrates its centenary, we reflect on how much times have changed. But there are still threads of history so relevant today. Defence nurses are still risking their

lives on the frontline, pay is still a huge issue, and activists are driving the College forward to help members.

“ *The tales the men from the Somme tell are terrible. How some poor fellows go mad and some die from fright or shock and all swear terribly.* ”

“ *Some of my men were very bad with shell shock. One poor child looking not a day older than 14, but who said he was 18, was very*

bad – too conscious and could not forget for a moment what he had seen. ”

Written in 1916 and taken from *A Nurse at the Front*, by Sister Edith Elizabeth Appleton.

Back cover image:
Poster from the 1969 *Raise the Roof* campaign which led to the largest single increase in salary in the history of nursing.

IS £6.14.0 A WEEK FAIR CASH-IN-
HAND FOR A REGISTERED NURSE
AFTER THREE HARD AND EXACTING
YEARS TRAINING?

h a r o



RAISE THE ROOF!
ALL NURSES DESERVE FAIR PAY

Royal College of Nursing and National Council of Nurses of the United Kingdom
Henrietta Place, Cavendish Square, London W1M 0AB Tel: 01-580 2646