

# SIGHTS SET



**DENISE HAS BIG  
AMBITIONS AS  
CHAIR OF THE  
TRADE UNION  
COMMITTEE**

## **ACTION**

ThruText:  
the new way  
to engage

## **CAREER**

How to build  
confidence in  
public speaking

**RCN  
ACTIVATE**

SUMMER 2022  
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**Dr. John McKinnon**  
(Professional Lead, RCN)



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### Don't forget, this is your magazine.

If you've got a story to share, tell us by sending an email to [activate@rcn.org.uk](mailto:activate@rcn.org.uk)

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## Reflections from Denise

As nominations open to elect the next RCN President, I've been reflecting on the opportunities that being your president has brought since taking on the role in July 2021.

Without a doubt, my highlight has been meeting with so many of you and having the opportunity to engage with members through our various forums, reps committees, regions, boards and countries, and at our RCN congress held recently in Glasgow.

While being RCN President is a big commitment, the role gives a unique opportunity to focus and highlight on key priorities for both the profession, and the populations we serve. An important part of this role is working collaboratively with others, being a team player and having a focus on the changes we as a nursing profession want to see.

We have almost half a million members, and this is a fantastic leadership opportunity for promoting the value of the nursing profession. We've made a commitment to driving improvements in equality, diversity and inclusion and this election is open to all. This is your moment, put yourself forward. I am not planning to re-stand for this role and I'm very happy to be contacted by anyone who is interested. Nominations are open until 4.30pm 20 July 2022.

**Dr Denise Chaffer**, President of the RCN



This issue of *RCN Activate* went to press on 29 June. Find the latest RCN advice and information: [rcn.org.uk](http://rcn.org.uk)

# Looking back on Congress 2022

RCN Congress took place in person for the first time in three years this June.

Members at the event in Glasgow debated a broad range of agenda items from overworking, to assisted dying, compassion fatigue, supernumerary status and more.

Several resolutions were passed, including campaigning to protect the title “nurse” in UK law and calling for a full ban on conversion therapy, which includes all LGBT+ people.

Issues relating to ethical recruitment and the fair treatment of overseas nursing staff were also hotly debated, with members keen for the RCN to produce a strategy to support the

development needs of international staff and better recognise their skills.

Keynote speaker and former Prime Minister Gordon Brown backed our demands for investment to tackle nursing shortages and fair pay for nursing staff.

Finally, following his powerful speech about the excellent nursing care he received while recovering from COVID-19, world-renowned author Michael Rosen was awarded an RCN honorary fellowship.

Catch up with all the action and debates online: [rcn.org.uk/congress](https://rcn.org.uk/congress)

**i** Congress 2023 will take place in Brighton from 14-18 May.



Congratulations to all our RCN Awards winners, who we celebrated at this year's Congress. Find the full list of winners: [rcn.org.uk/rcnawards](https://rcn.org.uk/rcnawards)

## TOP FIVE

### New resources

1. **Time to talk about nursing pay.** How to have structured conversations with your colleagues: [rcn.org.uk/fair-pay-for-nursing](https://rcn.org.uk/fair-pay-for-nursing)
2. **FAQs for international staff.** Advice on NMC registration, employment contracts and more: [rcn.org.uk/international-nursing-faqs](https://rcn.org.uk/international-nursing-faqs)
3. **Neurodiversity pocket guide.** How to recognise the strengths of and make reasonable adjustments for nursing staff who are neurodiverse: [rcn.org.uk/publications](https://rcn.org.uk/publications) (code 010 157)
4. **Delivering immunisation services.** Practical and clinical guidance for managing vaccination services safely and effectively: [rcn.org.uk/immunisation-services-delivery](https://rcn.org.uk/immunisation-services-delivery)
5. **Meaningful activity.** Advice on introducing physical, social and leisure activities for care home residents: [rcn.org.uk/meaningful-activity](https://rcn.org.uk/meaningful-activity)

# Our fight for fair pay across the UK

## FAIR PAY FOR NURSING

As *Activate* went to press, we were preparing to ballot members on Agenda for Change contracts in Scotland on a pay offer that would give the majority of NHS staff there a 5% pay increase. It follows inconclusive negotiations with the Scottish government. We've urged members to reject the offer.

Meanwhile, we were anticipating the announcement of pay awards for NHS staff in England and Wales. The situation in Northern Ireland is complex as a government hasn't been formed following elections in May. We continue to demand the immediate restoration of the Executive there.

On the Isle of Man, the RCN is balloting its members working for Manx Care to ask if they will accept or reject a new combined pay offer – a 4% pay award for 2021/22 and a 4% pay offer for 2022/23 – and if the offer is rejected, whether they'd be willing to take industrial action.

On Guernsey, the RCN will be formally consulting members on whether they accept or reject a new pay offer over the summer. The three-year pay offer is: in 2022, a pay rise of 5% plus a £500 payment to be added to all pay scales, for 2023, an uplift matching RPIX in Guernsey (as at 30 June 2022) and for 2024, an uplift matching RPIX (as at 30 June 2023) minus 1%.

In the independent sector, members employed by Marie Curie have been voting on the latest pay offer, following the rejection of two previous offers in ballots in 2021. The consultative ballot was due to close on 1 July, and asked members if they would accept or reject the new offer – which is to align with the NHS on pay, unsocial hours, annual leave, overtime, high-cost area supplements and maternity pay for all clinical staff in bands 2-7. For bands 8a and above the offer is a 3.5% pay rise and only aligning with the NHS on maternity pay.

Also, members employed by health and social care provider Four Seasons Healthcare voted to reject a pay offer worth between 4% and 4.7% for 2022/23 in a consultative ballot. There will now be further negotiations involving the RCN and other recognised unions.

Members employed by the specialist health provider Huntercombe Group in Scotland and England voted in a consultative ballot to accept an offer of 2% for nursing support workers and 3% for registered nurses.

Members working at Coveberry (part of CareTech), which provides assessment and rehabilitation services for adults with learning disabilities, accepted a pay offer of an increase of at least 6.58% for nurses and 9.45% for support workers.

## RCN elections: President and Deputy President

Nominations are now open for members to put themselves forward for election to become the next RCN President or Deputy President. These important roles

will help shape the focus and direction of the RCN for the next two years. Nominations close on 20 July. Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/current-elections](https://rcn.org.uk/current-elections)

# Cutting thru the noise

ThruText is a new way for members to connect with other members. Here's how some are using this digital technology to effect change

ThruText is an online tool for peer-to-peer texting that allows meaningful conversations to take place between members. It's been especially helpful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when speaking to people in workplaces was much more difficult.

It isn't about sending text messages to the masses. It's about having real, person-to-person conversations that help members get involved and take action.

Members receive messages like any other text, but they're sent using the ThruText website, which allows members' contact

details to remain protected while allowing for conversations about the issues that affect them, local actions, ballots, and so much more.

In the late summer of 2021, we used ThruText as part of our pay campaign to encourage members working for the NHS in England and Wales to vote in our ballots.

Since then, reps and other activists have been trained in using the technology and have been making good use of it for member-to-member engagement. We spoke to five activists to find out about their experience of using ThruText.

## 'Embrace it'



In January 2022, RCN members in Northern Ireland were asked to vote in a consultative ballot on

the 3% pay award for HSC staff on Agenda for Change terms and conditions.

As part of that, I used ThruText to try and engage with as many members as possible ahead of the ballot.

It's a very user-friendly online platform and it can be used on any equipment, such as the trust's desktop computer, my RCN iPad or my personal laptop, as it's web-based. This made it really convenient to use as a busy activist – I could fit it around when it worked for me, wherever I was.

In the modern era we live in, text messages could be viewed as a more traditional

method of communication and I think more people are likely to engage with that.

People get so many notifications on social media; a message can get lost in the noise.

ThruText allows you to cut through that and go more directly to the member.

My top tip for using ThruText is to embrace it and not worry. It's really easy and intuitive to use.

*Andrew Doherty is a registered nurse, staff side secretary of his trust, RCN steward, Secretary of the North Western Branch, and Northern Ireland*

“

I was surprised at how easy it was to use



Stock image

### 'Take your time'

When someone first mentioned ThruText I thought, “that’s going to be a lot of work and I’ve already got loads going on”.

I tried using it anyway, and I was proved wrong. It doesn’t take that much time and effort, and it’s very effective at engaging members.

I was surprised at how easy it was to use, especially with the pre-written responses available.

I’ve got so much from it. I’ve got new people involved in my branch and I feel like engagement is really high.

It can start a conversation if the recipient is up for that, or if they don’t want to they don’t have to, so there’s that element of control too.

My biggest piece of advice for any new users of ThruText is: don’t panic. Take your time with it. It may feel like a lot more



work but it’s actually incredibly manageable.

*Carmel O’Boyle is a nurse practitioner and Chair of the RCN’s North West Regional Board*

## 'It works so well'

Geographically, my branch covers about a third of Wales, and lots of it is quite rural.

It's hard to be connected with all the members in our patch but with ThruText I was speaking to people from across mid and west Wales.

I started using it during the pay campaign but have continued to use it to connect with members locally. When I began using ThruText,

we were in the middle of the pandemic and we weren't allowed to walk the wards as usual.

I think it works so well because people are always using their phones and there's no risk of it going into their junk folder. I mainly use the pre-prepared responses, but I put Diolch (Welsh for thank you) at the end.

*Helen Williams is an adult epilepsy nurse, RCN safety rep, the Mid and West Wales*



*Branch Secretary and represents Wales on the UK Safety Reps Committee.*

## 'Set boundaries on when to respond'



I'm not that confident speaking to people, so using ThruText to engage with members during the pay campaign over the summer of 2021 was perfect.

It's my favourite thing to have come out of the campaign, I found it empowering being able to communicate with so many different people.

The best thing about the messages is that they're personalised, and the recipient has a choice of having a conversation and asking questions, or just simply being reminded of

something, such as a ballot or branch meeting.

It's so simple and effective. Our RCN Norfolk Facebook page saw an increase in members overnight after using ThruText, as we were directing people to engage with it.

My top tip for using it would be to set boundaries on when you're going to respond to messages – you can be quite absorbed by it.

*Natalie Brooks is an emergency care staff nurse, RCN steward, Vice Chair of the Norfolk branch and Chair of Eastern Board.*



## 'A direct way to reach out'

I live and work in the island of Westray, on one of the Orkney Islands in Scotland. I'm currently the only RCN steward in Orkney, and I'm representing a lot of members who live on the other islands.

ThruText piqued my interest because of this, as a direct way to reach out and connect with other members – it's something I've been craving for a long time.

The first time I used it, I sent out a message saying: "Hi, it's Martha, I'm your local RCN rep. If you could change one thing about where you work, what would it be?"

I got really good responses back from that. I used it recently to let my local members know I would be at the hospital for Nurses' Day, and to come and have a chocolate and a chat.

I think the key to using ThruText well is making sure there's a human element to it.

Using the pre-made responses is useful, but when you use the free text box to respond, make sure that it doesn't sound like it's a robot.

*Martha Gill is a community island nurse and employee director, RCN steward*

*and represents Scotland on the Professional Nursing Committee.*



While ThruText has primarily been used for the pay campaign, it can play a role for reps and branches in reaching out to members to have meaningful conversations about issues affecting them.

We're still in the testing phase, so there'll be lots of exciting developments on this soon.

If you want to stay up to date and be the first to hear about opportunities to get involved, head to [rcn.org.uk/organising](https://rcn.org.uk/organising) and sign up to the mailing list.



# Safe staffing solutions

June's created new ways for colleagues to escalate concerns including trialling a speedier DATIX form option

"I talked to staff every day and heard how stressed they felt because of staff shortages," says June Ramsay, a patient flow facilitator and RCN steward.

"We had people taking time off for stress, and staff who were exhausted. People were struggling to do their own shifts, let alone work overtime."

As a result, June developed a series of strategies to support frontline staff when escalating safe staffing concerns at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow.

This included practical suggestions to make it easier for staff to record incidents caused by short staffing.

"No one was coming to save us, so this was our way of trying to make the situation slightly better," she says.

June, who works on an elderly care ward, promoted her health board's guiding principles, which advise staff on how to provide basic care when staffing levels are low.

She also made sure staff knew who their RCN reps were, and how to contact them.

## Challenging the norm

However, the principles raised more significant staffing questions. "Staff are naturally very uncomfortable about these principles," she says.

"When staffing levels are low, they're expected to carry out very basic care. But as nursing staff, we're not trained with that ethic in mind, so a lot of people find the pressures of short staffing a real struggle. The principles weren't what we were looking for, we were looking for more staff."

“

A lot of people find the pressures of short staffing a real struggle

Words by  
Becky Gilroy



Stock image

choice in that scenario.” June has since rallied her hospital to trial a drop-down option on DATIX forms specifically for short staffing concerns, with questions that help managers keep a record of these issues.

“Management can sometimes surprise you – in my health board, they’ve been very receptive to our ideas, and they listen to what we’ve got to say,” says June.

“There aren’t enough beds, and there’s real pressure on us to get patients in and out as fast and safely as possible. This puts more pressure on nursing staff. If the work you do from first thing in the morning to last thing at night is high pressure, it’s a difficult place to work.”

June advises staff to think about their communication with upper management and how to present ideas as also beneficial to the wider workplace. “Our health board actually underspent its nursing budget this year – and the vacancies are high, but we’re not getting enough staff interested in joining us.

“So, investing in our existing staff and their role in encouraging recruitment is a more convincing argument.”

June started to look more broadly at the staffing problem – the use of agency staff, the number of vacancies and rotas.

“I considered the skill mix, the type of vacancies, and what information we needed to provide staff alongside basic nursing care guidance,” she adds.

This included initiatives to recruit a range of nursing staff, encouragement to get people involved in recruitment, and guidance on how to present their department as a desirable place to work.

“We focused on the training that might be available, what career opportunities we can offer, and what our staff enjoy most about their roles.”

June noticed how substantial the staffing shortages had become, especially during peaks of COVID-19 infection, and care was being compromised as a result.

### Reporting on DATIX

When she advised staff to raise concerns, they often told her they didn’t have time to file a report on DATIX, the trust’s electronic incident reporting system. “But if you don’t log it on DATIX, there is no record of it happening,” she adds.

“This showed me just how short staffed we were. Often it was impossible to do. Nursing staff might have to make a choice between sitting down and completing a DATIX or caring for a patient. There’s only one

**i** Find out more about safe staffing: [rcn.org.uk/safe-staffing](https://rcn.org.uk/safe-staffing)

# Shifting expectations

Top tips for supporting overworked staff

Overworking isn't a new thing for nursing staff, but it shouldn't just be accepted as part of the job.

"It might just be an extra half an hour here, or an hour there, but somehow, in some areas of nursing, we've got into a culture of working over our shift and this has to change," says RCN steward Zoe Carciente.

The results from our Last Shift Survey reveal the shocking extent to which nursing staff overwork. Of the 20,000 respondents, two thirds said they worked over the end of their last shift, with most not being paid for it.

At last month's RCN Congress, members overwhelmingly

supported a resolution calling for RCN Council to investigate the impact of overworking on the health and wellbeing of members.

## Negative impact

Overworking means not getting sufficient rest between shifts, which can affect mood, mental wellbeing and lead to burnout.

Studies have also shown a link between working overtime and an increased likelihood of making errors. In addition, poor staff wellbeing has been shown to have a negative impact on patient safety with more chance of near misses.

Whether it's writing notes after a shift handover or finishing

“

**Nursing staff need to prioritise their own wellbeing**



medication rounds, paediatric nurse Zoe says staff often feel compelled to stay after their allocated hours to complete tasks.

“Nursing staff need to prioritise their own wellbeing and feel empowered to start saying no,” she says.

Zoe also suggests managers should lead by example and help create a culture that encourages staff to leave on time.

“Staff should be supported by managers and colleagues to not work longer,” she says.

“Of course, there may be the odd occasion when we stay late to care for a particularly sick person, but this shouldn’t be the norm.”

With 12-hour shift patterns standard for many nursing staff, strict time keeping is important for patient safety

as well as ensuring nursing staff get sufficient time off to recuperate and rest.

**Duty of care**

Leona Cameron, RCN Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing, says it’s not only up to nursing staff to change the culture of overworking; there’s a legal duty for employers to assess the risk of fatigue and take measures to prevent harm occurring.

“Many nursing staff feel they can’t leave colleagues in the lurch, but overworking is detrimental to health and wellbeing,” says Leona.

“Employers have a duty to make sure extra demand is not leading to work-related stress and ideally, they should follow the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Management Standards.”

Leona advises reps to escalate overworking concerns through their usual workplace channels; if they don’t get a response, they should raise a concern with senior management about the health, safety and wellbeing of employees.

“There’s a real risk that nursing staff will suffer work-related stress if they don’t take their breaks and work over their allotted hours,” says Leona. “Staff shouldn’t be made to feel guilty for taking their breaks or finishing on time.

“The duty of care is on the organisation; they have to make sure there are adequate controls in place, including suitable and sufficient risk assessments, so that nursing staff don’t feel they have to work extra,” she adds.

*Words by Susan Embley*

**Five steps to support action on overworking**

- 1. Ask to see your employer's stress risk assessment** – this will be different for every organisation, but all employers should have risk assessments to identify areas that could be a cause for concern with regards the health, safety and wellbeing of staff.
- 2. Familiarise yourself with the Health and Safety Executives and/or the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland websites** – there are specific guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all employees regarding stress and fatigue.
- 3. Changing the culture** – nursing staff need to look after themselves so should encourage each other to take breaks, and rest between shifts.
- 4. Allotted time for notes on shift** – many nursing staff report not being able to finish notes on shift; this should be included on the rota for each person to allow them to complete their tasks and not feel they have to stay later.
- 5. Call it out** – if overworking is an issue in your workplace, don’t let it go unnoticed. Make sure you raise it as a concern.

# Four steps for raising and escalating concerns

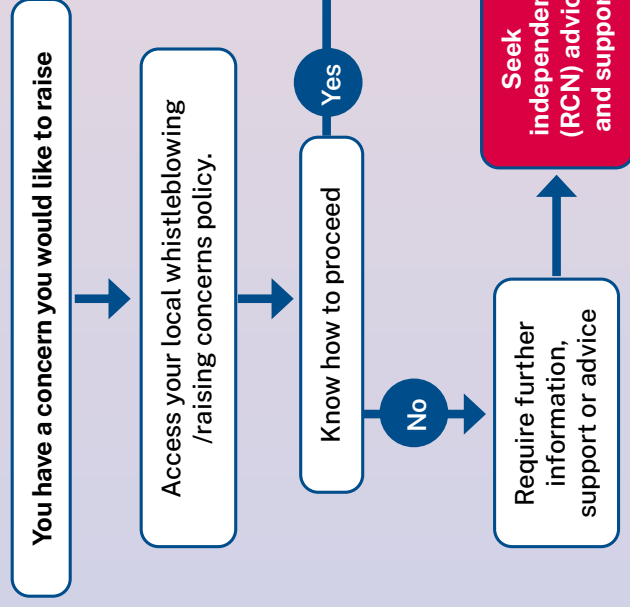


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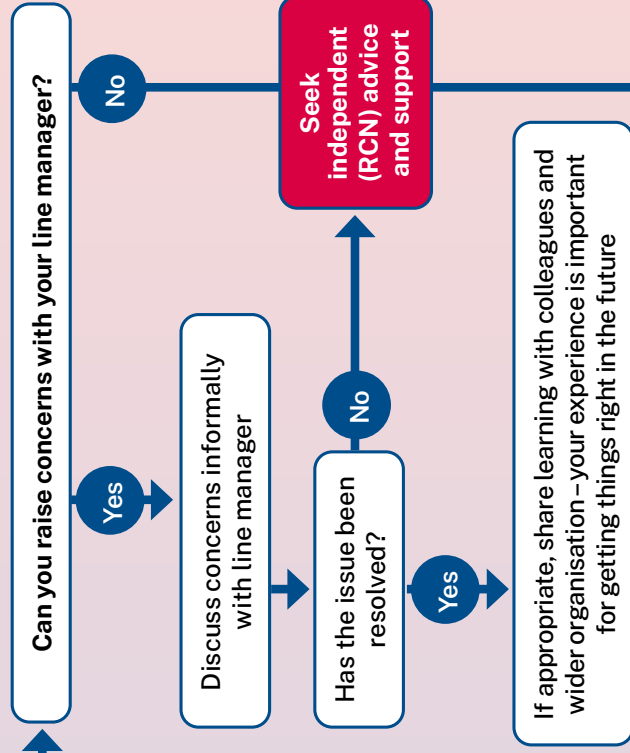
Use our flowchart to help you make decisions about raising concerns.

Find our full guidance at [rcn.org.uk/raising-concerns-guide](https://rcn.org.uk/raising-concerns-guide)

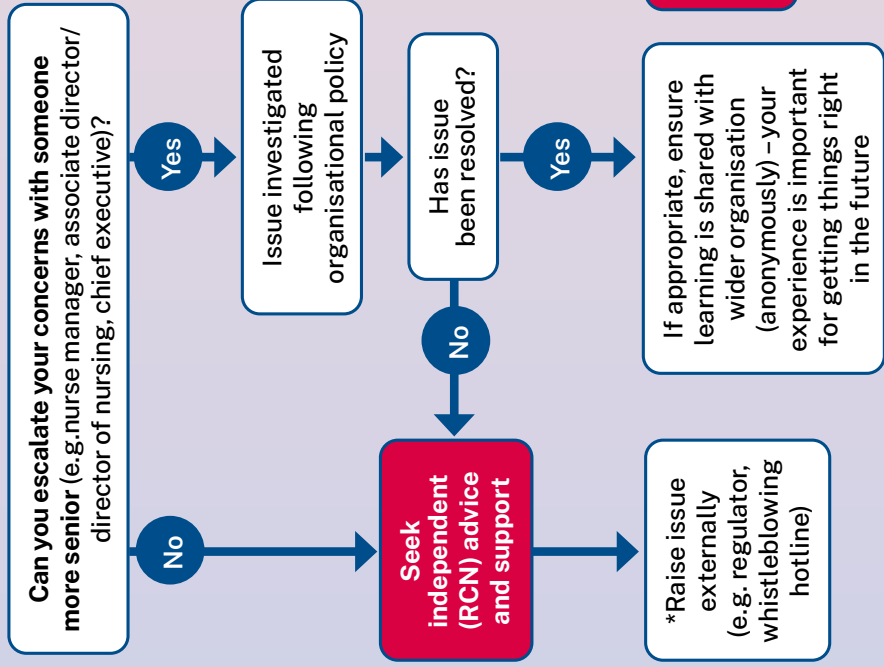
## 1. SEEK ADVICE



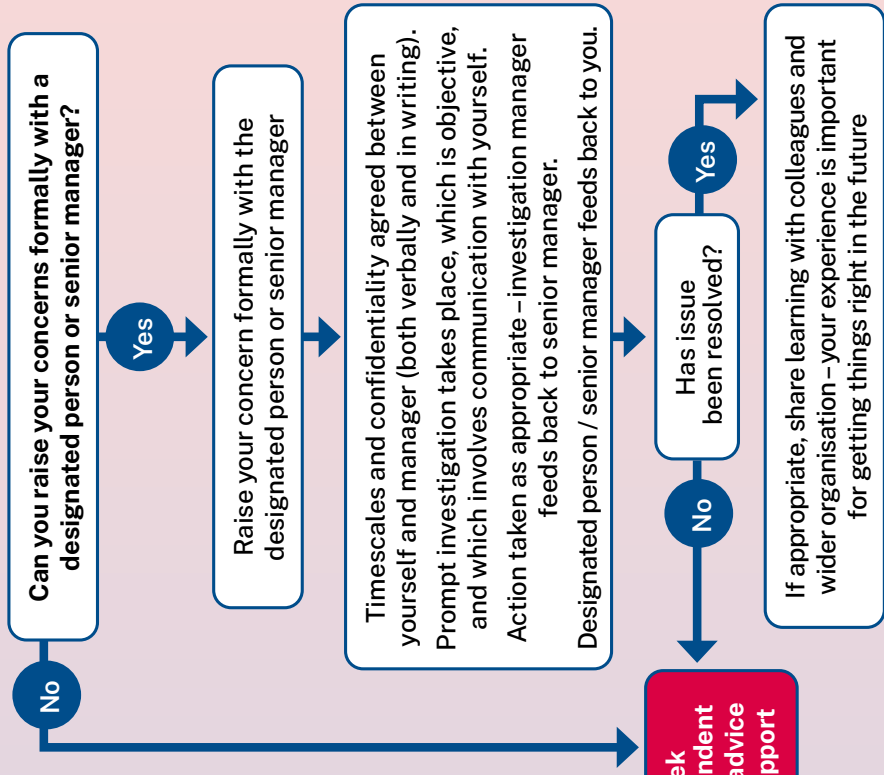
## 2. RAISE CONCERNS INFORMALLY



### 4. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ESCALATION



### 3. RAISE CONCERNS FORMALLY



\*Raising your concern externally without clear evidence of first raising the concern internally or with a regulatory organisation would only be considered appropriate and give you protection under PIDA in the most extreme circumstances and if it could clearly be shown that you were acting in the public interest.

# ‘We can amplify our voice and win’

From helping lead historic strike action to becoming Chair of the RCN’s Trade Union Committee, Denise is determined to convince members they can be heard

Read more online:  
[rcn.org.uk/activate](https://rcn.org.uk/activate)

“I’m a frontline nurse, I know what it’s like on the ground. I see, hear, and feel everything our members are experiencing,” says Denise Kelly, the newly elected Chair of the RCN’s Trade Union Committee.

Denise comes to the role having served as Vice Chair since January 2021. The committee is responsible for developing the RCN’s trade union functions and activities, ensuring the organisation is modern and progressive.

“I feel very humbled and privileged to be elected,” says Denise. “Being Vice Chair built that sense of purpose and unity within me, and over the past year and a half, I’ve built strong relationships and personally got to know every single member of the committee, and it’s lovely to know that they have trust and confidence in me. They know that collectively, we will strategise and deliver the very best on behalf of members.”

Denise has a number of priorities for the committee,

including the RCN’s pay campaign for both NHS and independent sector nursing staff, alongside staffing for safe and effective care. “Both are very much interlinked,” Denise says. “We need proper terms and conditions to enable staff to deliver the care patients need.”

## Making moves

Denise will now also have a seat on the NHS Staff Council and wants to positively influence the review of terms and conditions, such as time off in lieu, job evaluations, flexible working and career progression, as well as undertake a nationwide review of nursing job descriptions. “Members deserve to feel respected, protected, valued and appreciated for the vital work they do, and must be remunerated commensurate with a safety critical profession,” she says.

Denise has been working hard in her role as Vice Chair to achieve equity between the trade union and professional sides of the RCN. “We’re doing a lot

of collaborative working now, with a focused, united front,” says Denise. “It shows members that when you sign up, you’re getting both elements – the best of both worlds.”

## On the picket line

While there was once a perception that the RCN

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Members deserve to feel respected, protected, valued and appreciated

Denise Kelly, pictured by Aaron McCracken



would never take industrial action, the historic strike in Northern Ireland three years ago showed there has been appetite to take a stand, Denise believes.

“People realised we’re strong as nursing staff, and as a trade union. We can amplify our voice – and win, as our strike action showed. But it’s all about the members.

“It’s critical that members know they will be consulted every step of the way, and their vote is their voice.”

Denise describes herself as a “real grassroots trade unionist”, and this is best reflected by her role in the Northern Ireland strike action in 2019.

She was due to fly to Iceland for a much-anticipated family holiday – but then events took a very different turn. “Instead, I was on a picket line alongside my colleagues in Northern Ireland, making a stand on behalf of nursing and patient care,” she recalls.

“Luckily, my family knew how important it was to me, and how much time and effort I’d invested into organising our action to make it successful.”

As Chair of the Northern Ireland Northern branch at the time, Denise had also led the local strike committee, helping co-ordinate three days of action over the staffing crisis and pay,

which ended when Northern Ireland achieved pay parity with the rest of the UK.

“It meant a lot of negotiating and giving assurances to patients and staff that safety wouldn’t be compromised,” she says. “Industrial action really is the last resort when all other options are exhausted. It’s a very powerful tool to engage, educate and empower.”

Looking back, she feels the Northern Ireland campaign was her finest achievement to date.

“It showed nursing staff could stand up for themselves and patients. It’s changed history, there’s no doubt about that,” says Denise.



**i** Find out more about the Trade Union Committee: [rcn.org.uk/trade-union-committee](https://rcn.org.uk/trade-union-committee)

# Delivering a powerful point to a politician

Introduce yourself, take a deep breath and come prepared with real-life examples, says Laura

The first major political interaction I had was hosting a South East London MP event. It gave members the chance to speak to MPs and that opportunity made me feel proud.

We were able to tell them exactly what it's like on the frontline and how challenging it is. We need to start engaging with MPs a lot more. Seeing them react to what my colleagues were saying was a lightbulb moment for me. We can be political, and we don't have to be uncompromising or aggressive.

It's really about starting a conversation, highlighting issues in a way politicians can relate to, and being memorable so they might relay those points in the Commons, potentially resulting in some real change.

There's been a couple of high-profile political events organised by the RCN recently, including the Valuing Nursing Summit, which brought together members to speak with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid.

Having the opportunity to speak to the Health Secretary was amazing, and we got across some

important points to him, such as what it's like in nursing at the moment as staff face financial challenges and what needs to change to protect the future of the profession and patient care.

Another event saw a delegation of RCN London members meet with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan.

The event was a great local opportunity to speak openly and frankly about how the rising cost of living in the capital, especially rising transport costs, is putting more and more staff under severe financial pressure and making it harder for employers to retain nursing staff, risking patient care.

## More voices, more stories

It's so important that we don't shy away from engaging politically. It gives us, as members, the power of having a voice.

The more voices we have, the more stories we share, the more likely change will happen. Don't miss your opportunity. We need more people to stand up and say what's important to them and take up these opportunities to go to these events, to speak to MPs, to write to MPs.



“

Keep your cool and get your point across well



Laura Duffell



The RCN is committed to engaging politically across the four countries. We have recently held a number of high-level political events, including with Sadiq Khan, as pictured above.

### Overcoming nerves

Having the confidence to speak to influential people can take practice. It can be nerve-racking at times. When I was growing up, I was always the shy person in the classroom.

So, when attention is turned to me at these political events, I focus on my passion and why I'm doing what I'm doing.

I'm concentrating on the fact that there are so many nursing staff out there who don't feel they can speak up. I have a few tips to share to help keep your cool in these situations and get your point across well.

Firstly, always make sure you introduce yourself, so they know who they're speaking to. That could just be your name and your role, you don't have to say the organisation you work for.

Speaking slowly is a definite must. Take a deep breath and collect your thoughts before you start talking.

I always have some bullet points written down. This could be on a scrap piece of paper, or on your hand.

It doesn't need to say much. Write down what it is you want to get across or ask. You need to make sure

you're making a very clear and strong point succinctly before the person you're addressing loses focus.

There's another tool I find works well in delivering a poignant point to a politician, if you have enough time.

Using a relatable case study or example really drives the reality of your point home. You must bring that politician into your world.

*Laura Duffell is Chair of the RCN Inner South East London branch and Health and Wellbeing Manager at King's College Hospital.*

# How to be confident at public speaking



Whether you're doing a presentation or speaking at Congress, giving a speech can help boost your career and confidence

## 'I get a buzz from public speaking'



### TOP TIPS:

- **find your people** – have a few that you can discuss your presentation or speech with, and who will give you constructive feedback
- **write it down** – what's in your head is valuable and can be lost in a cloud of emotion
- **don't compare yourself** – and don't be afraid to reach out to those who you think are good speakers to ask for tips.

I've always spoken openly about issues that affect me and others. I speak for myself, but also on behalf of those sometimes afraid to speak up, such as nursing students or people from ethnically diverse backgrounds. However, I'm not always a confident, outgoing person.

I'm an omnivert, which is both an extrovert and an introvert. I can go from socialising a lot, to needing to be alone. It's taken me a while to realise, but I get a buzz from public speaking.

However, I'm naturally quite an emotional person, so I must keep checking my

notes to remain focused. I'm the perfect example of a human swan – looking calm and collected on the surface, while paddling frantically under the water.

*Cyzel is a third-year nursing student and is the RCN Students Committee member for the South East region.*

## 'Humour can disarm people'



### TOP TIPS:

- **know your subject** – that's absolutely crucial and will help instil confidence
- **use anecdotes and humour** – it's a powerful way to get your message across – humour can disarm people
- **just do it** – your mind might tell you not to, but don't play along with that game.



## 'I need to instil confidence in others'



### TOP TIPS:

- **don't feel you need to be perfect** – actually, not being perfect is more authentic and relatable
- **accept that people might ask you questions that you may not know the answer to, and that's OK** – you could use this as an opportunity for debate or dialogue by asking others for their opinion.

Public speaking is not something I've always felt comfortable doing. However, as my career has progressed, I've taken the opportunity to push myself.

At the most recent RCN Congress, I hosted a session for around 120 members and contributed to debates on stage.

In my position now as a senior leader and coming from an ethnic minority background, I need to help instil this confidence in others like me, and be a role model.

Growing up in a South Asian household, women were not encouraged to express their opinion, especially if they

went against hierarchy or men. This certainly affected my confidence in speaking up, but going through the different roles in my career has helped me address this.

*Rabina Tindale is a chief nurse and a member of the RCN Nurses in Leadership and Management Forum steering committee.*

In my first attempt at public speaking, I was anxious, my legs actually shook. One of the first events I had to speak at was in Hartlepool Town Hall and it was a discussion about anxiety – the irony was not lost.

After that, I decided to seek opportunities for public speaking. At RCN Congress over the years, I've made a point of getting up at least once during the week to speak in the debates, and each time it has become

easier. Speaking in public has given me confidence in other areas of my work as well. I served on RCN Council for four years and I would never have envisaged myself doing that previously.

*Gordon Lees is a rep, President of the Tees Valley branch and an RCN Changemaker. If you're interested in joining your RCN rep colleagues to become a changemaker, you can do so on the reps hub.*

# Risk assessments, raising concerns and refusal to treat

Top five resources to support members through abusive incidents

You have the right to be safe at work, no matter what setting you work in.

Employers are legally required to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments to identify the hazards staff are exposed to and to take all reasonable steps to eradicate or minimise the risk of harm. This duty of care exists even when there are staffing shortages.

We've rounded up the most useful resources to help reps support members who've experienced or been affected by abuse at work.

## Fact check

Our latest employment survey revealed the extent of workplace abuse.

- **64%** of respondents said they'd experienced verbal abuse in the previous 12 months.
- **26%** said they'd experienced physical abuse.
- **63%** said dissatisfaction with the service provided was the reason they were verbally abused.

In many cases, dissatisfaction which led to abuse was linked to frustrations with COVID-19 restrictions, waiting times and gaining access to services.

## Advice guide

1

We've created an advice guide to help members identify abuse, including sexual harassment and assault.

It includes guidance on how to refuse treatment to a patient, and how to determine if this is the right action to take, as well as how to take sick leave as a result of abuse. There are also helpful notes on how to raise concerns in your workplace, with links to model letters and further guidance if the incident was related to short staffing.

Find out more:

[rcn.org.uk/violence-at-work](https://rcn.org.uk/violence-at-work)

## Prioritising personal safety

2

Our prioritising personal safety advice is aimed at community-based nursing staff, with details on performing risk assessments in patients' homes.

It has guidance on various abuse scenarios, including situations where a member might feel threatened by someone else's behaviour or if the environment itself is hazardous. It has model letter templates as well as action examples for five different dangerous scenarios. Find out more:

[rcn.org.uk/personal-safety](https://rcn.org.uk/personal-safety)



### Unsustainable pressures

3

**Nursing staff are under pressure to ensure services are delivered in a safe and timely manner, and the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing pressures.**

Our webpages have a range of useful links, resources and articles for reps and members to refer to, which cover abuse scenarios.

There are specific tools for raising concerns, risk assessments and key advice for nursing and patient safety, especially when staff are working under extreme pressure.

Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/unsustainable-pressures](https://rcn.org.uk/unsustainable-pressures)



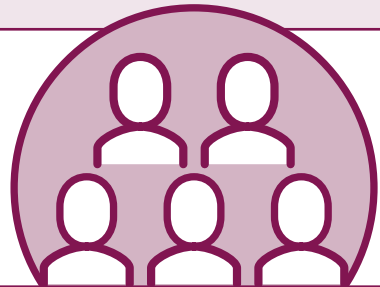
### Legal help

4

**Whether a workplace injury or not, our personal injury specialists can help RCN members obtain 100% of their compensation if they're hurt during an abusive incident.**

The service is completely free to members, regardless of whether the claim is successful. It also includes specific advice for each devolved nation, eligibility details and details on how to make a personal injuries claim.

Find out more:  
[rcn.org.uk/personal-injury](https://rcn.org.uk/personal-injury)



### Nursing Workforce Standards

5

**These standards have two key points that may help reps support members.**

Standard 12 outlines that the nursing workforce should be treated with dignity and respect.

Staff should be able to raise concerns without fear of detriment, and have these concerns responded to.

Standard 13c states that members working in people's homes or community settings should conduct dynamic risk assessments, which is a continuous process of identifying hazards.

For staff who are lone workers, there must be clear access to advice, supervision, and means of raising the alarm.

Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/nws](https://rcn.org.uk/nws)

### **i** Further information

The RCN acknowledges that tackling violence in the workplace is nuanced and that ways of reducing the risk of harm to staff may vary depending on their clinical environment and patient group.

All members can contact the RCN advice team for further support online: [rcn.org.uk/contact-advice](https://rcn.org.uk/contact-advice) or you can call them on **0345 772 6100**. Lines are open 8.30am-6pm weekdays.

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