

Scottish Labour debate: Recognising the Importance of Family Caregivers

Briefing from RCN Scotland

Key messages

- Care homes have been at the centre of the COVID-19 crisis, despite the commitment of staff to try to keep residents as safe as possible. It became clear at the start of the pandemic that previous resilience planning, both nationally and locally, did not adequately incorporate the community and care home sectors.
- The problems care homes have faced are symptoms of how the sector, and the people that live and work in it, have been undervalued for too long. The RCN reacted to this crisis within care homes in every area of our activity over the last six months and we are determined that the problems that have been highlighted by the crisis do not fade back into the background.
- The RCN has long argued that as complexity of clinical need increases, the skills, competencies and availability of the registered nursing workforce employed within care homes is becoming ever more important. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the workforce crisis facing Scotland's care home sector and the need for more registered nurses working in care homes to deliver care to residents with increasingly complex health needs. This is a long-standing problem which must be addressed.
- Within Scotland, 20% of registered care services report having nursing vacancies and the level is significantly higher in care homes for older people, with 46% of these services reporting nursing vacancies. 60% of providers indicate recruitment of nurses to be more difficult than the previous year. Registered nurses working on the frontline in care homes are feeling the impact of these nursing shortages daily and this strain has been amplified during the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Action is needed to deliver fair pay, terms and conditions for registered nurses and other nursing staff employed within care homes. The pandemic has placed a spotlight on the vital role that nursing staff play and a significant pay rise is required to make nursing a more attractive career and improve recruitment and retention.
- New support structures have been put in place to address the challenges that care homes have faced. Given the increase in clinical complexity within care homes, we welcome the new oversight role that has been given to the NHS Board Directors of Nursing. It should also be recognised that these new lines of accountability, as well as a flurry of guidance being updated frequently and new reporting requirements, are challenging for care home managers and staff. This is particularly true for providers with small staff teams and these new measures and lines of accountability require coordination and clarity.
- Testing infrastructure must continue to improve to meet demand to ensure that care home staff can access testing easily and receive their results quickly.
- We are clear that all nursing staff, no matter where they work, should receive full pay if they become sick, need to self-isolate or shield throughout the pandemic. However, many nursing staff working in care homes were only receiving statutory sick pay

(SSP) for COVID related absences. We therefore welcome the creation of the Social Care Staff Support Fund.

- RCN Scotland recognises the detrimental impact that restrictions on visiting have had on care homes residents and their families, particularly for residents living with dementia or learning disabilities, in terms of loneliness and isolation. We believe that a person-centred approach to care requires that the wellbeing needs of care home residents must be considered and prioritised alongside physical health needs, and recognises the interplay between emotional, psychological and physical health outcomes.
- To address this, care homes must be supported to put in place effective processes to ensure the safety of residents, family members and care home staff, including appropriate PPE, infection prevention and control measures and testing where appropriate. Taken together, and planned and implemented with the necessary expertise and resources, these measures can help Scotland's care homes to enable residents to maintain contact and connection with those close to them, supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes for residents and carers alike.

Valuing Scotland's care home sector:

The care home sector has been undervalued for far too long and it would be a failure of huge proportions if we do not learn the difficult lessons of the pandemic and tackle head on many issues which have, for years, been placed in the 'too hard to do' box.

We look forward to engaging with the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, led by Derek Feeley, to ensure the voice of our members is heard by the review panel and that the fundamental role registered nurses play in providing safe, person centred care in Scotland's care homes is recognised.

Our focus is on ensuring that, whichever model of reform is pursued by policy makers, the professional nursing perspective is understood and appreciated.

- As residents' complexity of clinical need increases, the skills, competencies and availability of the registered nursing workforce employed within care homes is becoming ever more important
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the workforce crisis facing Scotland's care home sector and the need for more registered nurses working in care homes to deliver care to residents with increasingly complex health needs. This is a long-standing problem which must be addressed.
- Action is needed to deliver fair pay, terms and conditions for nursing staff employed within care homes, protected time for continuing professional development (CPD) and clear career pathways for nursing staff working within the sector.
- The Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 is an opportunity to help ensure that care homes are supported to deliver safe, quality care to residents with increasingly complex health needs and we are calling for work on implementing the Act to get underway again. Implementing this legislation is urgently needed to address the workforce crisis in the sector and to ensure care homes are better equipped to meet the needs of residents.
- In particular, an evidence-based methodology for determining safe and effective staffing in the care home sector needs to be developed. This will be vital for ensuring that funding reflects clinical need and the correct staffing numbers and skill mix needed to meet these needs.