

## RCN Scotland briefing – Mental Health and Wellbeing in Primary Care

As the largest staffing group in the NHS mental health workforce, nursing staff play a key role in the delivery of services, including in primary care settings, whether they are, for example, mental health nurses embedded in GP practices or those working in the free standing Primary Care Mental Health Services.

RCN Scotland has engaged with the Scottish government via a number of groups, including the Mental Health in Primary Care development group, and we will continue to be involved with this agenda as a member of the new National Oversight Group associated with it. We expect the Scottish government to continue to involve the nursing workforce in all future plans in this area.

There is clear evidence that mental health services have been struggling for a long time. The national standard is that 90% of people referred for psychological therapy should start treatment within 18 weeks. However, this standard has never been met<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, more than 20% of young people wait more than 18 weeks for access to CAMHS treatment and the 90% national standard has again never been met<sup>2</sup>.

Any debate on mental health and wellbeing in primary care settings must acknowledge that no amount of service redesign or additional funding will improve services while so many mental health nursing posts remain unfilled. Mental health nursing vacancies have been rising for the past 5 years and are currently at record levels with over 1,000 posts unfilled (up from 661 a year ago)<sup>3</sup>. This figure includes more than 500 mental health nursing vacancies in community settings.

RCN Scotland welcomes the increase in mental health student intake next year, however an increase of around 150 mental health student places is not going to fix the staffing crisis overnight. Similarly, the pledge for 1,000 extra roles within primary care settings across a range of disciplines and the Action 15 commitment are both welcome but are no substitute for sustainable workforce planning.

What is needed is a long-term, fully funded workforce plan for mental health services, both in primary care and acute settings. In our *Protect the Future of Nursing* manifesto ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, we called for a commitment to undertake modelling to project the growth required in the mental health nursing workforce and develop a fully-costed and transparent workforce plan.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/psychological-therapies-waiting-times/psychological-therapies-waiting-times-quarter-ending-september-2021/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times-quarter-ending-30-september-2021/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://turasdata.nes.nhs.scot/data-and-reports/official-workforce-statistics/all-official-statistics-publications/07-december-2021-workforce/dashboards/nhsscotland-workforce/?pageid=5982>

To date, Scottish government workforce planning, including that contained in the NHS Recovery Plan, has been poor. RCN Scotland was therefore disappointed that the promised National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care, which was due to be published last year has now been delayed. And we continue to push for the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 to ensure that we have safe staffing levels in all health services, including primary care mental health services.

**Further information**

If you would like any further information please contact Ross Sanderson, Senior Public Affairs Officer, by email at [ross.sanderson@rcn.org.uk](mailto:ross.sanderson@rcn.org.uk) or by telephone 0131 662 6197.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.