

RCN Mental Health Forum Annual Report 2023

Introduction

We are the Mental Health forum of the Royal College of Nursing, and as such, our role is to represent mental health nursing and all things mental health within the broader family of the RCN. Co-production is central to everything we do, producing resources for your professional development and campaigning for better policy locally and nationally.

This end-of-year report of the Mental Health Forum demonstrates the various projects and workstreams in which the steering group and colleagues have engaged over the past year. Our work this year shows how we are an environment for forum members to network, share ideas, inform, and influence practice, research and education while lobbying and developing national policy and legislation.

As you will see below, the past year has been a significant change for us. Not only has our remit expanded to cover mental health and wellbeing in our portfolio of work, but we have also developed how we work with colleagues internally and externally.

Membership of the forum

- Total number – 14101 including first choice 11160.

Reflections on 2023

This has been another busy year for the forum, and we have ensured that for the past year, we have not only continued with critical pieces of work initiated in 2022, including continuing to work with the [One Voice collaborative](#) and ensuring that the nursing voice is heard in this work. We have continued to shape and develop our lived experience reference group, and this group is now collaborating with the RCN Women's Health Forum, Nursing in Justice and Forensic Health and Midwifery forums.

The RCN Ethnic Minority subgroup has continued to grow, and this group has now merged with the [Sharon] Dennis group and formally renamed the RCN Mental Health Forum Global Majority and Ethnic Minority (GEM) Sub-Committee. Further details of the work of both subgroups are outlined below.

A special welcome

We are delighted to say that after completing a formal application and recruitment process, we have been successful in filling a vacancy on the RCN mental health steering committee. Ann Cox is a very experienced nurse consultant and clinical academic who works in CAMHS provision. Ann will be a welcome addition to the team and help ensure we can cover all age ranges.

Events

RCN Sub-Committee Inclusion Cafe Book Club discussion about David Harewood's book: "Maybe I Don't Belong Here" (29th June 2023)

This virtual event, chaired by the Sub-Committee chair, reflected on David Harewood's book, which launched the Ethnic Minority subgroup in 2022. In his book, David described his lived experience of psychosis, including concerns about the poor quality of care received in the 1980s and racism encountered in this society. Only a few participants had read the book, yet it proved to be a stimulating evening with a lot of learning and discussion about the struggle's black nurses face. Many have chosen to do agency work rather than apply for a permanent role. While it was fruitful for those who attended, we discussed how this event can be improved next time. Many had registered to participate in but failed to do so. The sub-committee plans to review the uptake of the Book club events with the RCN Media.

Panel discussion with members from the Royal College of Nursing Ethnic Minorities Sub-group (RCN-EMS) and The Open University's Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies (CABS) Professor Hilary Bradbury discussed participatory action research. Hilary drew on examples of successful healthcare practices that have brought about change and transformations for people with lived experiences, practitioners and policymakers involved in their care. A thought-provoking session attended by RCN members, academics, and carers sparked much discussion about the positive effects of using participatory action research, where participants feel fully involved in the co-production process as co-researchers.

Suicide Awareness and Prevention Programme

This meeting of Congress calls on Council to lobby for the implementation of an evidence-based, integrated suicide prevention programme for the nursing workforce across the UK.

Proposer: Ruth Baily (RCN East Sussex Branch); Seconder: Laura Daukintis (RCN Mental Health Forum Committee)

Introduction

It is our collective responsibility to foster a health and care system that embraces diversity and extends adequate support to those within marginalised groups. We will work collaboratively to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, promoting greater understanding and empathy. We must hold our profession and the systems we work accountable through transparency and responsibility. Working together can cultivate a culture of civility and compassion within our teams and organisations.

First and foremost, we will work collaboratively with our partners and key stakeholders across the UK to promote and engage with strategic and operational activities that support implementing an evidence-based, integrated suicide prevention programme for the nursing workforce. Furthermore, we have identified four areas to underpin our broader scope of work:

- Enhance equity in access to opportunities and support for marginalised groups (specific focus on ethnicity and race).
- Reducing the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide.
- Moving organisational and team-level culture towards civility and compassion.

- Use our statutory leverage towards influence and accountability.

Ongoing work has already been in place to address the mental wellbeing challenges of our members. However, suicide has received a revived specific focus following this congress item.

- The initial steering group meeting was held on 15th August.
- We have a dedicated [Suicide awareness](#) page on RCN Learn – updated regularly.
- We have endorsed the [Zero Suicide Awareness training](#).
- We have endorsed the [Working-together-to-prevent-suicide-in-the-NHS-workforce--a-national-suicide-prevention-toolkit-for-England](#).
- UK strategic leads for suicide prevention summit held in person at RCN London HQ on 11th September, which brought experts together to discuss the urgent issue of suicide prevention: [RCN leads crucial discussion on nursing suicide prevention](#).

Media Story

On the 24th November, we launched [a media piece](#) on the increase of reported suicidal ideation from our members accessing RCN counselling. We also have broader data of members writing suicidal thoughts who have not accessed counselling but other support services or representation at work. The story was covered live by Sky News, BBC Radio 4, and LBC. Other national press ran the story throughout the day.

Research

In response to the media story, we are commissioning a deep dive into our data. We aim to understand the contexts underpinning the increase in reported suicidal ideation among nursing staff in the UK from October 2021 to October 2023. The RCN will produce a report with tangible actions and recommendations for us and the more comprehensive health and care systems. This will be a crucial output of the group to share by Congress next year.

Subcommittees

The former Ethnic Minority subgroup, now renamed the RCN Mental Health Forum Global Majority and Ethnic Minority (GEM) Sub-Committee, continues to grow, and be expertly chaired by Dr Ann Mitchell. The group exists to articulate the diversity and intersectionality of the lived experience of GEM members within the mental health forum and across the four nations the RCN represents to influence the development of nursing practice and policy.

This committee continues to meet virtually every two months. It is currently working on plans to relaunch this new group and develop more library events to provide a safe space for members to join and discuss sensitive matters occurring in practice.

The lived experience subcommittee works with colleagues from the RCN Women's Health Forum, nursing in Health and Justice, and midwifery forums. To develop products aimed at raising awareness among nurses, midwives and registered nursing associates concerning the needs and care pathways/patient journey for women with complex mental health needs, which may have been influenced by a previous life trauma (from poor infant attachment, childhood isolation/rejection through to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse). This work is underway and is due to be completed in early 2024.

Consultations/policy development

Members of the forum contributed to the formation of the following national initiatives:

Is Mental Health Nursing being diluted? <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/Blogs/unlawful-substitution-of-mh-and-ld-nurses-in-uk-inpatient-services-021023>

Worked with the Health Services Safety Investigations Body – to inform investigations relating to mental health care. <https://www.hssib.org.uk/search/?q=mental+health>

Alcohol misuse: how to have a crucial conversation - [Alcohol misuse: how to have an essential conversation | RCN Magazine | Royal College of Nursing](#)

Mental health support for young people: promoting choice, improving access [Mental health support for young people | Mental Health | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](#)

Forum members lead a piece of work to develop standards for the professional nurse advocate role education and training programmes and modules, and these can be seen at: [Professional nurse advocate standards | Publications | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](#)

Forum members coauthored Five Years On: Are We Achieving Parity between Physical and Mental Health? The experiences of UK nursing staff. [Five Years On | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](#)

Potentially unlawful substitution of mental health and learning disabilities nurses. <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/Blogs/unlawful-substitution-of-mh-and-ld-nurses-in-uk-inpatient-services-021023>

RCN position on the substitution of mental health nurses in inpatient mental health wards across the UK <https://www.rcn.org.uk/About-us/Our-Influencing-work/Position-statements/rcn-position-on-the-substitution-of-mental-health-nurses-in-inpatient-mental-health-wards>

RCN position on the National Partnership Agreement: Right Care, Right Person (RCRP)

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/About-us/Our-Influencing-work/Position-statements/rcn-position-on-the-national-partnership-agreement>

Plans for 2024:

As a committee, we hear from our members that several core areas of need directly affect mental health nurses and nursing, and we are currently working internally to look at how we can expand our sub-committees to ensure we can give a dedicated focus to these areas of need.

As the RCN institute develops, we will work closely with the RCN to ensure that this institute will cater to the needs of mental health nurses and nurses.

We are planning to host an event to bring together mental health nurses and key stakeholders to better understand mental health nurses' needs concerning legal literacy.

We are also looking at ways to communicate more effectively with you and our members and ensure we hear your voices to lobby and influence on your behalf. Keep an eye on these pages as we will make announcements here.

Date prepared and by:

Jointly prepared by RCN Mental Health Forum Committee Members, 28th November 2023.