

RCN Mental Health Forum – Annual Report 2025

We are the Mental Health Forum of the Royal College of Nursing, and our core purpose is to champion the voice of mental health nursing within the wider RCN community. As a forum, we strive to ensure that mental health remains a central and visible priority across the organisation. Co-production underpins everything we do: we work alongside members, partners, and people with lived experience to develop meaningful professional resources, shape learning opportunities, and influence policy at both local and national levels.

This end-of-year report showcases the diverse range of projects, initiatives, and workstreams that the steering group and our wider colleagues have been involved in throughout the year. Our work continues to provide a dynamic environment where forum members can come together to connect, share expertise, and contribute to best practice. We support the development of research, education, and clinical innovation while advocating for legislative and policy improvements that directly impact mental health services and the nursing profession.

Over the past year, we have also strengthened our partnerships across the RCN and expanded our engagement with members, bringing forward new opportunities for networking, learning, and collaboration. Through events, consultations, campaigns, and resource development, we have aimed to amplify the perspectives of mental health nurses and highlight the critical challenges facing the workforce.

As the report reflects, it has been another highly productive and purposeful year. We are proud to have completed several significant pieces of work in collaboration with RCN colleagues and forum members, and we remain committed to driving forward positive change for mental health nursing in the year ahead.

Membership of the forum:

- 2024: 14215 of which 11102 first choice
- 2025: 14,763 of which 11292 first choice
- Committee membership is at full capacity
- No current vacancies

Reflections on 2025:

This year has once again been exceptionally busy and highly productive for the Forum. Steering committee members have devoted significant time and energy to representing the mental health nursing profession across a wide range of meetings, consultations, and national events. Through their continued commitment, the Forum has ensured that the voice of mental health nurses remains visible, influential, and central to key discussions shaping policy, education, workforce wellbeing, and the future direction of the profession. Their engagement has strengthened our presence within the RCN and across the wider mental health landscape, helping to champion the priorities, concerns, and expertise of our members at every opportunity.

RCN Representations:

Royal College of Nursing – Mental Health Forum

Listening Events Report 2025

Introduction

Throughout 2025, the RCN Mental Health Forum held a series of listening events to hear directly from mental health nurses, students, academics, stewards, and wider mental health professionals across

the UK. The purpose of these sessions was to identify current challenges, gather insights, and shape the Forum's priorities for 2026 and beyond.

Across three events—held on **21 July**, **30 September**, and **20 October 2025**—approximately **87 members** participated. The combined discussions revealed a consistent set of concerns around workforce safety, the future of mental health nursing identity, dilution of roles, student experiences, AI, racism, access to professional development, and the need for improved national advocacy. This report summarises the key themes, concerns, and suggestions raised, with preliminary areas for Forum action.

1. Listening Event: 21 July 2025 (c. 70 attendees)

1.1 Education, Curriculum & Professional Identity

Attendees repeatedly raised concerns about the erosion of mental health nursing as a distinct profession. Key points included:

- **Questions regarding the RCN's role in shaping the MH nursing curriculum** in England and Wales (Phil Cotgreave).
- **Concerns about core competency expectations**, particularly around physical healthcare.
- **Dilution of mental health training** within HEI programmes (Francesca – IoM, Ben Prior).
- **Inconsistency in Nursing Associate (NA) education**, especially in MH settings (Lucy).

Many felt that MH nursing content has been overshadowed by physical-health topics, contributing to a loss of identity and reduced specialist preparation.

1.2 Workforce Wellbeing, Trauma, and Support

- Calls for **trauma-informed approaches for staff**, including support during investigations and distressing workplace processes (Lisa Macdonald).
- Mention of the **Professional Nurse Advocate (PNA)** role as a potential support mechanism.

1.3 Student Experience, Employment & Career Prospects

- Significant anxiety from students regarding **job prospects** after qualification (Foday).
- Concerns that some MH students feel **unsupported and exploited** within the system.
- Questions around **how the RCN can advocate for better employment pathways**.

1.4 Service Pressures & Patient Safety

- Mental health bed shortages and long waits were described as the **MH equivalent of corridor care**, yet receive far less attention (Catalina Cerlinca).
- Several contributors feared that role dilution leads to unsafe practice and future accountability risks for registered nurses (Lindsey Foots).

1.5 Digital Nursing & Practice

- Members asked for guidance on **implementing digital nursing in MH settings** (Roberta Hays).

1.6 Professional Role Dilution

- Widespread concerns about the diminished visibility and value of MH nurses.
- Reports of:
 - Band 4 staff replacing RNs.
 - CPN roles being reframed as “care coordinators” rather than specialist nurses (Donna Muir).
- Request to **strengthen partnerships with RCN Stewards** to tackle unsafe role substitution.

1.7 Website and Resource Parity

- Multiple attendees noted the **limited MH-specific CPD and learning content** on the RCN website and requested improved resource parity.

1.8 Outcome: MHN-Specific Conference

Participants strongly supported the creation of a **Mental Health Nursing-specific conference**.

Action: Laura to circulate a poll via Facebook and an email EOI to include members not using social media.

2. Listening Event: 30 September 2025 (c. 12 attendees)

2.1 Closures of Local Services

- Concerns about **closures of mental health, women's health, and domestic abuse charities** and the subsequent pressure on MH services (Nicky Lambert).

2.2 NMC Registration Costs & Course Sustainability

- Anxiety about potential **increases to NMC registration fees**.
- Fears that HEIs may **shut down MH nursing courses** due to financial pressures.

2.3 Job Prospects for Newly Qualified Nurses

- Worries about **limited employment opportunities for NQMHNs**, with some universities helping graduates pursue work in Australia.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence – Ethics, Safety & Student Wellbeing

- Questions around:
 - How to teach moral, ethical, and safety considerations.
 - The risk of students over-relying on AI tools when isolated from home.
 - Public safety implications due to lack of robust regulation.

2.5 Identity of Mental Health Nursing

- Increasing public perception that “nursing” equates only to hospital-based roles, diminishing recognition of MH nursing.

2.6 Racism & Workforce Safety

- Serious concerns regarding:
 - **Rising far-right sentiment and visible displays of nationalism** causing fear for BME nurses (Gifty Markey).
 - **Inaction by leadership** when racist incidents are reported.
 - Racist content posted by some nurses on social media.
- Request for the **NMC Code to explicitly address anti-racist practice**.

2.7 Communication & Visibility

- Members requested:
 - Sharing of **positive stories**, success, and good news.
 - A **newsletter** or improved forum updates.
 - Clear updates on **ongoing forum actions**.

2.8 Summary of Emerging Agenda Areas

- AI in MH nursing
- Racism and workforce protection
- Positive communications (newsletter, blogs, updates)
- Transparency and reporting on Forum actions

3. Listening Event: 20 October 2025 (5 attendees)

3.1 Congress Representation

- Concern that the **RCN Congress agenda lacks mental health coverage** (Helen).

3.2 Mental Health Policies for Staff

- Some Trusts lack **mental-health-informed policies** for staff substance misuse.
- Need to ensure MH is considered **before disciplinary action**, recognising the health impact.

3.3 Support for Bank & Agency Staff

- Widespread recognition that casual workforce members receive **little to no supervision, support, or debriefing**, despite managing high-risk situations.

3.4 Nurse Prescribing & Advanced Practice

- NMPs and ACP/ANP roles often under-utilised, with limited CPD and organisational support (Kyle McInnes).
- Call for an **RCN Position Statement** on:
 - appropriate use of NMP skills
 - CPD requirements
 - support for Nurse Consultants

3.5 Student Placement & Preceptorship

- Ongoing issues with **placement quality** and **insufficient preceptorship** for NQMHNs (Jo Odams).

3.6 PNAs & Support Structures

- PNAs should be used more proactively for **bank and agency staff** (Becky Burgess-Dawson).

3.7 Ideas for RCN Congress Motions

1. **Mental health considerations in staff substance misuse policies**
Recognising substance misuse as a health issue before disciplinary action (Helen to develop proposal).
2. **Support mechanisms for bank and agency staff**, particularly after distressing incidents.
3. **Clinical supervision for ALL nurses**, including those not permanently employed.
Highlighting that supervision is part of the NMC Code.

4. Cross-Cutting Themes Identified Across All Events

4.1 Workforce Pressures and Safety

- Understaffing, escalating acuity, rising violence, and high burnout.
- Widespread fear that MH nursing is losing its specialist identity.

4.2 Dilution of the MH Nursing Role

- Band 4 substitution, reduced specialist training, and genericised job titles.
- Feelings of being undervalued and professionally undermined.

4.3 Inequality, Racism & Discrimination

- BME nurses described increased fear and vulnerability.
- Concerns about Trust inaction and lack of national guidance.

4.4 Education, Training & Career Pathways

- Insufficient MH content in curricula.
- Lack of clear NA/NMP/ACP career standards in MH settings.
- CPD gaps across the system.

4.5 Student Experience and Employment

- Poor placement quality, limited job prospects, financial pressures, and lack of transparent support.

4.6 Digital Transformation and AI

- Uncertainty around regulation, ethics, patient safety, and student use of AI tools.

4.7 Communication & Visibility

- Desire for:
 - a regular **newsletter**
 - more **MH-specific CPD content**
 - stories of professional success
 - updates on **Forum actions**
 - improved cross-Forum collaboration (e.g., with Stewards)

5. Recommendations and Proposed Forum Actions

5.1 Advocacy & Influence

- Develop position statements on:
 - MH role dilution
 - Use of NMPs and ACPs
 - Anti-racist nursing practice
 - Mental-health-informed staff substance misuse policies

5.2 Education & CPD

- Engage with HEIs to improve MH curriculum depth.
- Increase MH-specific content on the RCN website.
- Support standardisation for MH Nursing Associates.

5.3 Workforce Support

- Lobby for:

- universal access to clinical supervision
- improved support for bank/agency staff
- trauma-informed organisational practices

5.4 Communication Improvements

- Introduce:
 - Quarterly newsletter
 - Updates on forum progress
 - Member-shared blogs and positive stories

5.5 Mental Health Nursing Conference

- Begin planning for a dedicated **MH Nursing Conference** based on overwhelming member support.

Conclusion

The 2025 listening events demonstrate a mental health nursing workforce that is passionate, diverse, and deeply committed—but increasingly concerned about identity erosion, lack of support, and gaps in training and professional recognition. The issues raised will directly inform the Forum’s priorities for 2026 and shape our advocacy with the RCN, regulators, employers, and national bodies.

The Forum extends sincere thanks to all members who contributed their time, honesty, and expertise. Their insights form the foundation of our next steps as we work collectively to protect, strengthen, and celebrate mental health nursing.

Committee members also participated in a national roundtable discussion focused on the development of the forthcoming 10-year plan for nursing and healthcare. The session was chaired by Nicola Ranger and brought together representatives from every RCN forum, ensuring a broad and inclusive range of professional perspectives. Our involvement helped to highlight the priorities and challenges specific to mental health nursing, contributing to a collective dialogue aimed at shaping long-term strategic direction for the wider nursing profession.

Committee members have also played an active role in several key national workstreams relating to children and young people’s mental health. This has included contributing to the revised version of the Leicester Tool, adapted specifically to better meet the needs of young people and support practitioners in delivering age-appropriate mental health care.

In addition, members have been closely involved in the national strategy meetings for CAMHS mental health leads, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of mental health nurses are embedded in strategic planning and service development. They have also participated in the CAMHS Mental Health Nursing Workforce meetings, where discussions have focused on current gaps, future workforce requirements, and strengthening recruitment, retention, and specialist training across child and adolescent mental health services.

Through these contributions, the Forum continues to influence national policy conversations and advocate for high-quality, well-resourced mental health care for children and young people.

Committee members attended a national roundtable hosted by NHSE focusing on Women’s Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) provision. They represented the nursing voice in discussions aimed at addressing health inequalities and improving the quality and safety of care for women in acute mental health settings. Members continue to contribute to this work as part of the ongoing NHSE working group.

Committee members will also be representing the Forum at the International Mental Health Nursing Leaders' Summit in Barcelona on the 21st and 22nd of November. This event brings together senior mental health nursing leaders from across the globe, providing an important opportunity to share expertise, exchange learning, and strengthen international collaboration. Our attendance ensures that the RCN Mental Health Forum remains connected to global developments and contributes to wider conversations shaping the future of mental health nursing worldwide.

Congress 2025

As in previous years, we had a highly successful Congress in 2025, and by ensuring committee attendance across all days, we were able to keep mental health firmly on the agenda throughout the event. Looking ahead, Congress 2026 provides an even greater opportunity to strengthen the voice of mental health nursing within the RCN.

For 2026, the Forum has been allocated 12 voting places, giving us a significant platform to influence debates, shape priorities, and ensure that mental health remains central to the RCN's work for the year ahead. To make the most of this opportunity, we are once again inviting forum members to apply for these voting positions so that our delegation reflects the diversity and experience of our wider membership.

As with previous years, selection will be based on ensuring strong and representative participation. However, for 2026 we must emphasise that any member who is allocated a voting place is expected to attend and actively participate in Congress. If a delegate accepts a place but does not attend without valid reason, they will not be considered for future representation on behalf of the Forum. This approach ensures fairness, accountability, and continuity, and enables us to advocate effectively for mental health nursing on the national stage.

We strongly encourage members to consider applying and to take this opportunity to help shape the future direction of the RCN and the wider mental health nursing profession.

Plans for 2026:

A dedicated webinar on Acute Behavioural Disturbance has been confirmed and scheduled for January 2026, providing an important opportunity to share best practice, clinical guidance, and emerging evidence with members and wider stakeholders.

The Forum has begun laying the groundwork for three significant largescale projects to be progressed in 2026:

1. Developing standards and educational resources for nurses working in addiction services, supporting specialist practice and improving consistency across the workforce.
2. Creating a suite of resources and learning offers on menstrual wellbeing in mental health settings, promoting greater awareness and improving care for individuals whose mental health is affected by menstrual health.
3. Designing a comprehensive training offer on long-term conditions (LTCs) in mental health, ensuring nurses are equipped to manage the complex interplay between physical and mental health needs.

These initiatives reflect the Forum's commitment to advancing practice, improving education, and addressing unmet needs across the mental health nursing landscape.

Name of Forum Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Daukintis', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Laura Daukintis

Date Prepared: 18/11/25

Professional Lead: Amber O'Brien