



# RCN Retired Members' Network

National Pensioners' Convention affiliated

Newsletter | June 2025

Welcome to the June edition of our newsletter. A big thank you to all our contributors for their articles.

The sad passing of Professor Dame June Clark, on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025, is marked by appreciations and references to her obituary and further articles. We also have a report from RCN Congress, Updates, and some dates for your diary – with information on how to participate in our network meetings, where we welcome all.

And, some reflections on what retirement means and what it can mean, and, finally, an account of the role of our network.

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## Professor Dame June Clark

June was the most inspirational member of the nursing profession I was ever to meet in my 69+ years of nursing. I first saw June at RRB (Regional Representative Body) that preceded Congress in the late 60's early 70s.

Never to be forgotten memories I have of June include her presence at the RCN Pay Campaigns 'Raise the Roof', 'Be Fair to Those Who Care', 'Pay not Peanuts', held in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square in London.

Outside of our RCN connections, as a student Health Visitor (HV) in 1974-5, I attended a study afternoon at which June was the speaker. I had become quite despondent with the health visiting I was seeing being practised where I had been based as a student HV. June's book *A Family Visitor* was to be my salvation! I modelled my HV practice on it that included to be involved with all members of the families I was visiting - not just the babies and pre-school children. I always remembered June's words, "and don't forget granny in the corner" when I was to make home visits.



At Congress in 1987 June encouraged me to get up and request that there be a Health Visitors' Forum within the RCN. This I did resulting in a deluge of other groups, Theatre Nurses being one requesting they too had a Forum. A Forum for HVs was to be set up the following Spring. Unfortunately I was unable to join its first meeting at HQ as the previous autumn I had been involved in a car accident that saw the end of my physically active career due to the life changing injuries I had sustained in it. Later I was to become the PRO of RCN WING (Work Injured Nurses Group) of which June was to become an extremely active supporter.

The RCN South East Region's RCN 75th Anniversary event in 1991 saw June as the then RCN President and Christine Hancock its General Secretary fly away from the party in a Hot Air Balloon as part of the celebrations! What a relief some weeks' later to see June at HQ attending an event that confirmed to me that they had come back to earth safely after that flight!

In 1993 I attended the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Quadrennial Congress held that year in Madrid. The entrance parade saw Christine Hancock and June, still our President, enter the arena resplendent in her Welsh National Costume.

June was to become very active as the first representative of the RCN on the National Pensioners' Convention (NPC) along with being instrumental in the inauguration of the RCN Retired Members' Network. Until only a few months before her death June was to join us on our online meetings of its Steering Group.

I have so many more never to be forgotten memories of dear June as so many others will doubtless have. RIP Dame Professor June Clark 1942-2025.

### Peggy Pryer

Many words have been written and tributes paid on the death of our dear friend and colleague Dame June Clark, 14th May 2025. June had a long and illustrious career as a Health Visitor and a

nurse educator and was a powerful activist in the RCN. She held many elected roles including those of Council Member and President.

Many nurses first encountered June through her articles and letters in the nursing press.

Always brilliant. Always to the point. Controversial, often challenging the received wisdom and the 'correct' ways of doing things. At Congress, she shone as a powerful, passionate, political nurse. June was happy to engage with anyone, anytime on anything related to nursing. She had no airs or graces, she was just June to everybody but she knew how to get her points across whether she was talking to the prime minister or a first-year nursing student. Back then, it was articulate people like June who ensured that attendance at Congress provided a brilliant professional and political education - not just in the formal sessions but in coffee queue conversations and late night discussions. She wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers and preferred to face things head on, which perhaps wasn't always the most effective way in achieving what she thought was right.

June was also well known internationally and worked with ICN on the International Classification of Nursing practice, seeking to agree a common global nursing language and diagnosis. She acknowledged that so much of nursing is tacit knowledge which is hard to communicate or quantify. Politicians and paymasters like to be able to put numbers to actions. One of her common refrains in seeking to describe the intricacies of nursing was 'if you can't name it, you can't count it'.

June retired from her role as Professor of Community Nursing in Swansea in 2003 but continued to be actively involved in nursing issues and in RCN activities. She was involved right from the start of the move in around 2011 to have some sort of group for RCN retired members. From 2012, when we have the first reference to a retired members' network, from which the NPC reps would be elected, June was active in following the progress of and promoting the Network. In 2015, June became one of the elected NPC reps, including a place on the Health & Social Care working party as a Special Adviser. For several years, June put together and presented to Council meetings a report on the Network. She was pro-active in the Network at Congress fringe meetings, starting up a newsletter and a Facebook page, as well as chairing the regular monthly Network meetings. From its inception by Council in 2017, June was involved with the organisation and delivery of the annual Retired Members' Conference. June maintained her interest and commitment to retired members and worked tirelessly to try to formalise the position of the Retired Members Network within the structures and processes of the RCN. Network members continue this struggle today! Her wisdom, passion and vision will be much missed.

## **Pat Hughes**

Some obituaries and tributes can be found, as follows.

The RCN reflects on June Clark's life and contribution (including the photograph above) at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/magazines/People/2025/May/Remembering-Professor-Dame-June-Clark>.

*The Guardian* has an obituary of Professor Dame June Clark at <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/06/june-clark-obituary>

The BBC has a piece at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002cf46>

## Report on the RCN Retired Members' Network Session, RCN Congress 2025, Liverpool

### Sue Warner

About 55 people attended the session. Each member of the audience was given two slips of paper, one to write what they would like to do, and the other, for what they would like the RCN to do, for retired members.

David Vickers addressed the history of development of retired members within the RCN. The RCN had affiliated itself with the NPC around 2013 and a useful historical record was developed by Professor Dame June Clark. However, in more recent years, the history of emerging decisions and practices has been less clear. The talk acknowledged the work done by working parties of the National Pensioners' Convention.

David pointed out the issues of the network becoming a forum and of governance for the four elected members. He also commended the group's quarterly newsletter, its formal and informal meetings, its chat sessions, Facebook page, and its annual conference, which will take place on 15<sup>th</sup> September this year, at RCN Headquarters, London, as a hybrid event, both in person and online. He concluded by asking, What we can do as activists, within the RCN, the NPC, and in other domains.

Sue Warner introduced her talk by asking whether members of the audience had previously heard of the NPC – just over a quarter indicated that they had. She then gave a short history of the formation of the NPC by Jack Jones, in 1979 and then introduced one of its working parties, the Women's Working Party, and their newsletter, *Women's Network Exchange*. The integration of personal lived experiences and narratives with current policy issues was a particular strength of the newsletter. For instance, recent articles had linked poverty in retirement following the raise of the state pension age for women and inadequacies in the treatment of older women's mental health to personal experiences of members of the working party. This echoed the themes of Nicola Ranger's opening address to Congress concerned with long waits in Accident and Emergency for mental health assessment and treatment. An agenda motion at the current congress (Motion 14) demanded greater investment in social care. The group was actively supporting the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign and contributing to the revision of mental health legislation.



**Speakers at Congress, Fiona Milner, David Vickers, and Sue Warner (left to right)**

The NPC in Northern Ireland (NI), where Sue was based, had developed links to an analogous organisation in the Republic of Ireland, resulting in the establishment of an Older People's Parliament at Stormont, campaigned against the cut of the winter fuel allowance, and supported the movement for an older persons' commissioner for England.

Her address also acknowledged early retirement compelled by factors other than directly by age – such as disability, injury, sickness and wounds – and those who have to continue to work, for financial reasons.

Sue thanked the Defence Nursing Forum for supporting her participation in Congress. Nursing in war was to be the subject of a keynote session the following day. Finally, Sue concluded that there was much to consider and asked, with Mary Oliver, What will you do with this one wild and precious life.

Fiona Milner then spoke about nurses who had retired, in the sense of claiming a work pension, and returned to work. She also noted the presence of implicit ageism in work practices, for instance, not being considered for promotions or for courses. She mentioned the crucial issue, that anyone in receipt of a pension was eligible to join the Retired Members' Network. In relation to governance, she commented that, if we can get the right structure, we can really make a lot of change. Becoming more vocal as we get older can both help younger people, in their nursing careers, and facilitate older persons' contributions. It was important, for the future of nursing, that we did not see age as something that is not positive. We needed to create an age-friendly culture.

A lively and full question and answer session followed the speakers' presentations. It was clarified, and further emphasized, that any pension receipt, which would not have to be NHS, such as a military pension, would qualify for membership of the RCN network. The group is in process of applying to be a forum within the RCN. It was crucial to remain active in retirement.

The RCN did not know how many retired people it had. Retirement was not currently an immediately retrievable characteristic from the database, but it might be helpful to make it so. The value of retired members' knowledge and experience was emphasized - if we do not learn from our history, we are condemned to repeat it. Retirement needed to be more than just retire and return and was best conceived as preferment, not retirement.

A significant number of attendees informally commented on the good quality of the session and a positive response was received from representatives of the NI Branch.

## Dates for your diary

RCN AGM, Thursday 17th July, 14-00-17.30, at RCN HQ, London. Register at

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/events/rcn-annual-general-meeting>.

*Retired Members' Conference*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2025, 11.00-15.00, RCN HQ, London. Register your interest at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/events/rcn-retired-members-conference>.

A Facebook page is available at

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNNationalPensionersConventionNetwork/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNNationalPensionersConventionNetwork/?locale=en_GB).

- Members are welcome to attend our formal and informal meetings, and the Chat, all held online. Formal meetings are held on the last Thursday of the month 11.00-12.30. Please contact Lucy Williams our RCN support officer [Lucy.williams@rcn.org.uk](mailto:Lucy.williams@rcn.org.uk) for the link to join the meetings.
- Informal meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month 14.00-15.00. The link is posted on the RCN Retired Members Network Facebook page.
- The online Chats tend to be held on the third Tuesday of the month 19.00-20.00 and the link is posted on the RCN Retired Members Network Facebook page.



## Updates

**LGBT+ Working Party, Liz Curr** – The working party works continually to support every person who falls under any of the protected characteristics – alongside LGBT+ individuals. Work on mental health through life and into old age, with a focus on the barriers and issues facing older LGBT+ people, is about half way finished. The group has spent a lot of time discussing the fall out and repercussions from the Supreme Court's judgement on what it is to be a woman and the subsequent interim guidelines from the office of European Commission on Human Rights. It has issued a statement accepted by Executive Council – that the National Pensioners' Convention will work within all of the relevant statute laws until more is heard back from the European Court of Human Rights via the challenge submitted by the Good Law Project.

As chair of the working party I have been invited to help judge this year's *Nursing Times* Workforce Awards. I have been asked by Derby University to become an expert by experience – to help share my nursing knowledge, my journey through and surviving cancer – and also my experience in terms of my journey as a nurse and patient as a transgender individual.

I have been contributing to work done by Manchester University, helping to support any trans student – the hope is to be able to support people through primary, junior and high school, then through college and university. This work is crucial in helping to try and keep trans students safe. The trans population as a whole has the highest rates of hate crime directed towards them, even though they only make up a small percentage of the population. There are also high rates of eating disorders, anxiety, and self-harm – suicidal ideation and suicides. For the first time ever since statistics have been recorded – the number of trans people murdered around the world passed 5,000, the vast majority trans women and trans people whose only way to survive is sex work.

The LGBT+ working party can be contracted via the NPC email, [npcuk.lgbt@gmail.com](mailto:npcuk.lgbt@gmail.com), or you can contact me directly, [cll5469@gmail.com](mailto:cll5469@gmail.com).

**Northern Ireland, Sue Warner** - Age NI has recently launched a research project called *My Hospital Journey*. They want to hear from people aged 65 and over about the care they received in hospital. More information and a link to the online survey can be found at <https://www.ageni.org/news/hospital-journey/>.

The latest edition of *Assembly Insider* has just become available at <https://mailchi.mp/nicva/assembly-insider-9-june-2025?e=6c1bad8c01>. It includes a link to the recording of the Committee of Health's deliberations on access to palliative care services, social care review, and health and social care pension schemes.

**Winter Fuel Payment** – Independent Age report developments at <https://medium.com/independent-age/winter-fuel-payment-spending-review-campaigners-beef59865b07>.

**RCN Activism Strategy** is reported at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/uk-rcn-activism-strategy-020625>.

## My 'Retirement'

### Peggy Pryer

I entered the nursing profession in 1955 as an 18 year old Student Nurse at the Tunbridge Wells School of Nursing. As I walked through the door of Blackhurst, the Tunbridge Wells Coat of Arms with its motto, *Do Well, Doubt Not*, was hanging in the hall. I have tried to emulate the motto throughout my nursing career.

My career ended abruptly in 1987 when I received life changing injuries in a car accident occurring travelling to a meeting in my role as an RCN Steward. I received cervical and lumbar spinal injuries for which I underwent surgery. Despite the surgery I was unable to return to my chosen profession, so I was medically retired at the age of 50. After enduring two years of enforced retirement with its increasing mobility problems and social isolation, I took the advice of a fellow RCN 'Work Injured Nurse' known to me and joined the now defunct RCN WING (Work Injured Nurses' Group).

I was soon to become WING's Public Relations Officer (PRO). 1990 found me attending RCN Congress in Brighton where I encountered many more RCN friends and colleagues. What an experience that was, being pushed around in a wheelchair in front of them by the late John Goodlad. The first item on the agenda that year was on the theme of Public Bodies being made aware of the needs of the disabled. I just had to speak on that! I got John to wheel me to the microphone where I said words to the effect that the RCN needed to get its own house in order before looking at Public Bodies! I had attended WING committee meetings at RCN HQ to find that wheelchair users and others with mobility problems had to gain entrance to the building by using the Tradesmen's Door in Henrietta Place. There were no disabled friendly toilets once inside the building, those who needed them had to cross the road and use the ones in the John Lewis department store! Look what we have now, disabled members can access the main entrance via a ramp, there is a suitably sized lift to access all levels in the building along with disabled friendly toilets!

I eventually had to accept that my life had been dramatically changed, so I became a member of the then local Community Health Council (CHC) - I served on this for the maximum period of eight years. I then became the Secretary of an East Kent Campaigning Group 'Concern for Health in East Kent' (CHEK), the principle aim of which was to see a new purpose built specialist hospital in the centre of East Kent to replace the very ancient (in hospital terms) Kent and Canterbury Hospital that opened in 1937. It remains one of the still awaited 40 new hospitals promised by the previous government!

I have remained an active member of my local RCN Branch. I am one of the Administrators of its Facebook page. I have served as a member on the South East Region's Board. Currently I am a member of the Steering Group of the RCN Retired Members' Network (NPC affiliated) and have been hosting its on-line informal meetings and monthly CHAT for all Retired RCN Members.

Summing up I would say, thanks to the support of friends and relatives, I am as active now, though in a somewhat different context, as I was during my 'working life'!



## Retired pensioner – what does that mean to you?

**Pat Hughes**

Retired and pensioner – two words that used to have a very negative connotation for me. Now, I feel comfortable describing myself as retired and as a pensioner. I was reminded of my old antipathy to the words at Congress 2025 as I chatted to friends and colleagues about the RCN Retired Members Network. It was clear that negative and off-putting images still exist including among those of us who have retired from paid employment and are living on our pensions.

The concept of retirement has evolved significantly over the years. For many it is seen as a time to relax and focus on your own interests and hobbies, a reward for decades of hard work. For some it may feel like the end of something precious, often a loss of identity and purpose. I wonder if this is more likely to be the case for nurses whose identity and sense of fulfilment is so often bound up in their professional lives? Lots of older nurses combine their passion for nursing with the freedom of retirement and get involved in all sorts of volunteering opportunities in local and national groups and communities as well as in their professional organisations and networks. Perhaps there is something to the old adage, 'Once a nurse, always a nurse.'

Retirement is usually talked about in terms of older people although there are significant numbers of nurses who chose to or are forced to retire early, some on health and disability grounds. One of the big changes in recent years is the increasing number of nurses who retire and return to work, for different reasons. The RCN Retired Members' Network embraces all these members regardless of why, when and how they are 'retired'. One thing that our Network does very well is to respond flexibly to the changing needs and patterns of engagement of our active members when plans and expectations may be more likely to require amendment or adaptation due for example, to health challenges or long breaks.

The word pensioner is value laden - often prefixed by the word poor, or more recently used as a political tool to sow division among the generations and create conflict. There is no denying that out of about 13 million pensioners in the UK nearly two million live in poverty and there may be a similar number of very wealthy pensioners. The National Pensioners Convention, the only national campaign group in the country which is run by pensioners for pensioners and to which the RCN is affiliated, recently considered changing its name but decided that the word pensioner embodies accurately its *raison d'être*. How do we own the word and promote a more balanced and respectful image and narrative?

I believe that the RCN Retired Members Network can and should enable retired members and those thinking of retirement to manage their retirement process in a way that honours their expertise and enhances their commitment and contribution, not only to the RCN but across society. It can be great fun and very stimulating to meet up with colleagues who are proud to be retired pensioners, and continue to make a massive contribution in all walks of life.

## Role of the RCN and retired members' network - benefits

### Fiona Milner

Any member in receipt of a pension is eligible to join the network.

According to NHS workforce data, 4,600 of 10,300 (44%) registered nurses who retired between July 2021 and June 2022 had rejoined the health service within 12 months. This represented a 4% increase returning from the previous year.

The increase follows an extension to pension rule changes first brought in during 2020 that mean certain health workers retiring at 55 can return to the NHS without any impact on their pension, even if they work full time.



Those aged between 55 and 59 are more likely to retire and return than those aged over 60. Almost half (48%) of all NHS staff, and more than half of nurses (56.3%), who retired between 55 and 59 later returned to work.

Older workers are more likely than younger workers to be managing multiple long-term conditions in relation to both physical and mental health.

- More than a quarter of people aged 55–64 live with a long-term musculoskeletal condition.
- Less opportunities for training.
- Less opportunities to act up.
- Poorer promotion prospects – despite experience.
- Higher requirement for flexible working, caring requirements, partner, grandchildren, elderly parents.
- Digital exclusion – digital difficulties.
- Visual, hearing, fine motor, bladder/bowel issues, age related
- Burn out and change fatigue.
- Not consulted on for work-based issues and changes or involved in focus groups.

Finally, invisible.

There are campaigns for improving the working lives of members of the older workforce, such as the Centre for Aging Better (<https://ageing-better.org.uk/>). They have an Age-friendly Employer Pledge, a nationwide programme for UK employers who recognise the importance and value of older workers. Employers commit to improving work for people in their 50s and 60s and beyond, taking the necessary action to help them flourish in a multigenerational workforce.

- Create an age-friendly culture
- Hire age-positively
- Be flexible about flexible working.
- Encourage career development at all ages
- Ensure everyone has the health support they need

Some NHS Foundation Trusts have subscribed to the Pledge.

Join the RCN Retired members' network (see information at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/membership/Existing-members/Retired-members>)!

Together we are stronger.