



# WILL YOU JOIN US?

MEET THE MEMBERS WHO ARE SHAPING OUR CAMPAIGN ON STAFFING FOR SAFE AND EFFECTIVE CARE IN ENGLAND

JOIN THE UK'S BIGGEST NURSING CELEBRATION THIS MAY  
P4 GOOD NEWS

'NURSING IS STEEPED IN STEREOTYPE'  
P7 OPINION

HOW TO SPEAK UP ABOUT POOR PRACTICE  
P10 FEATURE

INTERNATIONAL NURSING RESEARCH CONFERENCE  
P16 EVENTS

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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## Shed load of savings



### Make March xtra special

This month, you can make savings on everything from household bills and Mother's Day gifts, to family days out and cheap cinema trips.

Just visit **RCN Xtra** and start saving today.

*Xtra benefits. Xtra easy.*  
Register now at [rcn.org.uk/xtra](http://rcn.org.uk/xtra)



## Keeping children safe online

The RCN is getting behind a new campaign which calls on social media companies to do more to protect children from online harm. The campaign asks companies to sign up to a statutory duty of care and invest a slice of their profits in child protection and mental health research.

Fiona Smith, RCN Professional Lead for Nursing Children and Young People, said: "If duties of care for children exist in the offline world, they should exist in the online world too. Social media firms need to understand that with hundreds of millions of pounds of profit comes a responsibility to ensure children are kept safe and healthy on their platforms."

## Nursing cadet pilot

The RCN is supporting a new pilot initiative seeking to widen access to the nursing profession. The nursing cadet scheme, which is supported by HRH the Prince of Wales, will be aimed at hard to reach young people, like young carers. It will be trialled in Wales starting this year, in partnership with the Wales Army Cadet Force. Once cadets have completed the scheme, they'll be offered a guaranteed interview for a nursing degree programme in Wales.

## Imposed pay deal leaves members short

Imposition of a pay deal by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland means some members on Agenda for Change contracts may earn less from this month because enhanced pension contributions will exceed their pay increase. Staff on bands 5 and 8A are most likely to be hit.

The RCN in Northern Ireland says the situation has arisen because the pay deal was imposed without proper union consultation or full assessment of the implications.

The RCN is preparing to ballot members on industrial action in response to the imposed deal.

Visit [rcn.org.uk/northern-ireland-pay](http://rcn.org.uk/northern-ireland-pay) to find out the latest developments.



## New principles for CPD

The RCN has worked with other professional bodies and unions to develop five principles for continuing professional development (CPD). They say that CPD should:

- be each person's responsibility and be supported by employers
- benefit service users
- improve the quality of service delivery
- be balanced and relevant to each person's employment
- be recorded and show the effect on each person's area of practice.

Find out more at [tinyurl.com/new-rcn-cpd](http://tinyurl.com/new-rcn-cpd)



## Members set to debate hard-hitting issues

Prostitution, child poverty and loneliness are among the debates on the agenda for this year's RCN Congress in Liverpool.

Members attending the event in May will vote on a number of important resolutions aimed at improving health and life chances for vulnerable groups. Proposed resolutions include lobbying government to decriminalise prostitution and end period poverty. Reducing sepsis and the abuse of nitrous oxide will also be debated, as well as workplace issues like bullying and clinical supervision arrangements.

RCN Congress 2019 takes place in Liverpool from 19 to 23 May. To see the full agenda and book your place, visit [rcn.org.uk/congress](http://rcn.org.uk/congress)

## Education grants

Nursing staff can apply for the RCN Foundation Professional Bursary Scheme from 1 March.

The scheme offers grants of up to £5,000 per year to nursing staff for career development and CPD activities in the following areas; primary care, long term/chronic conditions, history of nursing and occupational health.

Applicants will be asked to explain how their course will improve patient care in their field.

The closing date for applications is 31 May 2019. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-foundation-grants](http://tinyurl.com/rcn-foundation-grants)

# Nursing degree applications down 30% since bursary axed



## RCN warns NHS Long Term Plan won't succeed unless decline in student nurse applications is reversed

Figures released by UCAS in February show that despite a small increase on last year, the number of people applying to study nursing in England has fallen by more than 13,000 since 2016, the last year students received the bursary. The RCN is urging the Government to invest at least £1bn a year back into nurse higher education in England to reverse the trend. The College has warned that if the decline in applications isn't reversed, the NHS Long Term Plan, which was published in January, won't have a chance to succeed.

With almost 41,000 nursing vacancies in England, the College has said the fall in student numbers further jeopardises the future supply of nurses and puts safe patient care at risk.

RCN Acting Chief Executive Dame Donna Kinnair said: "The Long Term Plan

deserves to succeed, but it cannot do so without the nurses to deliver it. These figures show we all need to work together to address the workforce crisis, not only through investment in nurse education in England but through a workforce strategy that reflects the demands of the population in each country. This needs to be underpinned by legislation that guarantees the right number of nurses and nursing support staff to provide safe and effective care."

The RCN's *Fund Our Future* campaign calls on the Government to invest at least £1bn per year back into nursing higher education in England to help stop the decline in student nurse numbers and recruit the nursing staff needed to keep patients safe. The College is calling for the Government to allocate the money as part of the Spending Review in spring.

Students in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can still access the bursary.

Find out more about the *Fund Our Future* campaign at [rcn.org.uk/fundourfuture](http://rcn.org.uk/fundourfuture)

## 4 GOOD NEWS

# Member demands action on staffing levels from NHS execs

RCN member Gay Lee has gone straight to the top to raise concerns about nurse numbers.

Gay, who's been nursing for 40 years, says she felt compelled to speak up at an NHS England board meeting. She'd been picketing outside as part of the Keep our NHS Public campaign group but went in to observe the discussion about the NHS Long Term Plan. She jumped in at the end when she felt execs had failed to address how they hope to have enough staff to deliver the aims of the plan.

"I've never seen the NHS in such a bad state as it is now," said Gay. "It upsets me a lot. You've been very congratulatory and yet what I've not heard in this meeting is any real concern about the workforce that is going to do all this wonderful work. We haven't got enough staff...we have no workforce strategy."

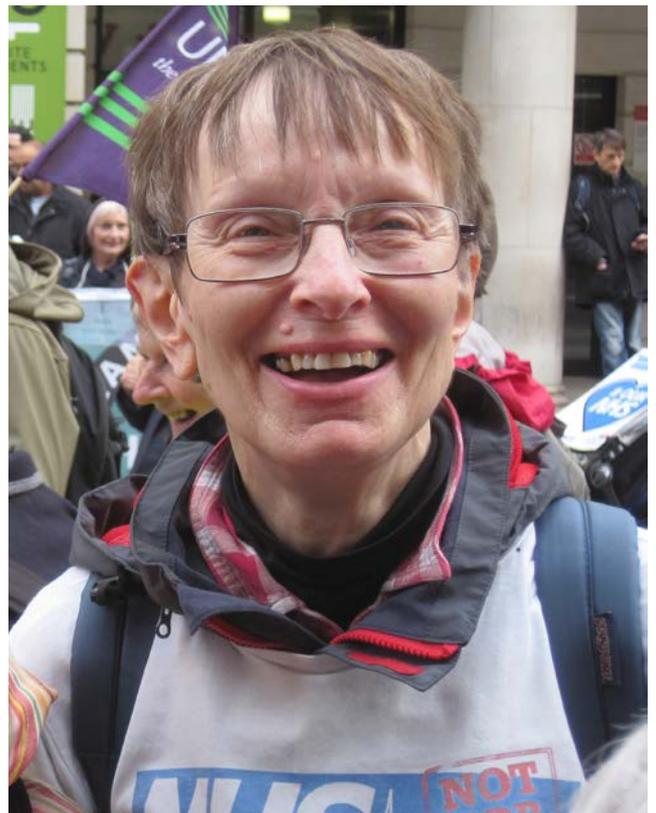
Chair of NHS England David Prior insisted nurse staffing is a priority. "The workforce is absolutely crucial to delivering the Long Term Plan," he said.

"But what are you going to do about it?," stressed Gay. "It's going to take three years and a massive amount of work to get enough nurses."

Well done for speaking out so frankly, Gay. We share your concerns. With almost 41,000 nurse vacancies in England, we think there needs to be urgent action to invest in growing the nursing workforce.

We're calling for £1bn to be invested in educating new nurses and for laws on staffing for safe and effective care in all four UK countries.

Find out how to get involved in our campaigns at [rcn.org.uk/campaigns](http://rcn.org.uk/campaigns)



### RCN Direct comes of age

More than 82,000 calls were made to RCN Direct last year with nearly three-quarters of queries resolved by staff at the advice hotline. The rest were referred to other RCN specialists for help.

It's been 21 years since the first call was made to RCN Direct on 1 March 1998. Now in 2019 it's easier than ever for members to get the information they need online. Visit [rcn.org.uk/get-help](http://rcn.org.uk/get-help)

### Order your pack for the UK's biggest nursing celebration!

Nurses' Day is fast approaching and this year we're inviting you to join us for the UK's biggest nursing celebration.

We know you're facing many challenges. But we also know how skilled and passionate you all are. So on 12 May we'd like to celebrate the remarkable difference you make by helping you hold parties in your workplace.

Order your free party pack, filled with materials to help you hold your own party, at [rcn.org.uk/nursesday](http://rcn.org.uk/nursesday) from 6 March.



## The big picture



Picture by  
robcurrie.com

Laura and Stacy joined a march through Jersey last month to call for fair pay for public sector workers. Members on the island will soon be balloted on taking strike action if mediation over a long-running pay dispute fails. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-jersey-strike](https://tinyurl.com/rcn-jersey-strike) to find out more.



It's World Poetry Day on 21 March. To mark this we're sharing some of the poems members have written about nursing that capture the many experiences and emotions nursing staff live through every day.

### I am me

Look at my eyes, can't you see?  
I'm not just an illness, I am me.

Look past the appearance, my greying hair,  
I'm still in there, I'm still here.

Look past the disease, the equipment around,  
the doctors, the nurses, I still stand proud.

Once a full life I lived in the past,  
a career, a family, time goes by fast.

My children grew old, had kids of their own.  
My husband passed on but I'm not alone.

Surrounded by loved ones, grandchildren  
arrived,  
watching them grow filled me with pride.

Memories made I'll never forget,  
my life passing by with no regret.

Remember this as you stand and stare,  
I'm not just an illness, I'm a person  
who's scared.

Scared of what's next, and how to let go.  
Leaving my family and not watching  
them grow.

But most of all as I wither away,  
remember the person I am today.

Not just an illness, not just what you see,  
I am a person, I am me.

**Lyndsey Curtis-Dawson**

To read more poems about  
nursing by members, visit  
[rcn.org.uk/bulletin](https://rcn.org.uk/bulletin)



## PATIENT PERSPECTIVE



### Karen says the specialist advice she's received from assistant practitioner Ellan Corner has been invaluable in caring for her sister

I first met Ellan when my sister, who has a learning disability, had to have a cataract operation. Ellan came to our home armed with eye patches and pads to help explain visually to my sister what would happen. When it came to explaining how the drops and the eye patch would work, she used me as a guinea pig. She took photographs for us to look at, reflect on, and talk about. She was brilliant.

I've seen a lot more of Ellan in the last few months as she's now supporting me as I face difficult decisions about my sister's end of life care at home with us. She's addressed sensitive but important practical issues, like what other carers

need to be aware of. Her compassion and empathy are striking and she always seems to know when I need to take a break from discussions.

She's had to do a bit of hand-holding lately, helping me gain confidence, by explaining complicated issues clearly and leaving me with information to look at. Nothing is ever forced.

She understands that when people have a learning disability things can change very quickly – not all medical professionals understand that. And she's reliable. If she says she'll get back to me with an answer, she always does.

Ellan's a compassionate and caring person with a big heart. You can't interview for that but that's why she's so good at what she does.

*Read more about Ellan's work on page 13.*

## THE VIEW FROM HERE



**Anma Ageli**  
Registered nurse

I was on a night shift when I was asked to take an A&E patient to a ward. The woman was quite short of breath, had a chronic lung condition and diabetes. My instinct told me this wasn't a good idea. But after being checked over and stabilised, I was told she was OK to be escorted.

After just a few moments in the lift, the woman collapsed, went into cardiac arrest and stopped breathing. I started CPR, which the lady's granddaughter found brutal to watch. She tried to pull me off her relative but I was on autopilot and got on with the job.

When the lift reached the ward floor, I carried on compressions, while shouting for help. A sister from ITU took over, while I went to get the defibrillator. The patient was shocked three times and eventually came round, much to everyone's relief.

At the end of the shift, I was told I'd done an amazing job and the woman wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for my quick actions. I stayed in touch with the granddaughter for a short while after the incident and she told me that what happened in the lift inspired her to become a nurse herself.

Sometimes you don't get much gratitude in this job, but the whole experience made me realise why I'm a nurse – to save lives. And to always trust my instinct if I feel something isn't right.

[rcn.org.uk/myrcn](http://rcn.org.uk/myrcn)



## What you've been saying

### What about regulating APs?

So I understand that nursing associates are now being regulated and registered by the NMC (*RCN Bulletin*, February issue, page 3). As an assistant practitioner (AP), I think we too should be regulated and registered. I feel we don't get any recognition or acknowledgement of our training and often get referred to as HCAs. I have studied for three years to be awarded my job title, but now feel worthless and degraded. I would like the RCN to work with the NMC and government on this matter which affects thousands of APs. Hopefully, one day soon, we will be awarded the recognition and registration we deserve.

Neil Priestley by email

### NA role should be celebrated

The nursing associate (NA) role provides a brilliant opportunity for experienced and motivated unregistered staff to develop their skills and progress into a more senior role.

It is so expensive to do a nursing degree these days that it is no longer an option for most. Good luck to them, they deserve this progression opportunity and we need them!

Alison Lee on Facebook

### Experience hands-on nursing first

The Government's NHS Long Term Plan outlines new ideas for nurse education (*RCN Bulletin*, February issue, page 8). What I feel they should do is to introduce a four-year nursing course. The first year should be learning the basics, the reality of nursing and ward life as an HCA, which will boost numbers on wards with people doing hands-on nursing. Then it should lead to the three-year degree. In the first year, the student should get paid as an HCA, so they will have money coming in. Wards will have numbers and those truly dedicated will stay.

Susan Kendall on Facebook

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH



We're determined to secure safe staffing legislation across the UK, to ensure patients get the safe, quality care they need and deserve

**RCN President Anne Marie Rafferty on our campaign on staffing for safe and effective care**

## FOUR THINGS TO DO IN MARCH

1. Order your party pack to celebrate Nurses' Day from 6 March: [rcn.org.uk/nursesday](http://rcn.org.uk/nursesday)
2. Tell your patients about the importance of eating and drinking well during Nutrition and Hydration Week, 11-17 March: [nutritionandhydrationweek.co.uk](http://nutritionandhydrationweek.co.uk)
3. Book your free place at RCN Congress to join the debates, learn something new and meet colleagues from all over the UK: [rcn.org.uk/congress](http://rcn.org.uk/congress)
4. Get an early bird rate on a conference on safe and secure handling of medicines. Book at [rpharms.com/events?details=3727](http://rpharms.com/events?details=3727) by 4 March.

## GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

The RCN Magazines team is always looking for members to contribute to the opinion pages. If you're keen to share your views, email [bulletin@rcn.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@rcn.org.uk)

## HOT TOPIC



### It's International Day of Happiness on 20 March. We asked members on social media, what makes you happy at work?

Getting a very sick premature baby out of the incubator, supporting the mother for her first cuddles and skin-to-skin contact and watching the happy tears flow. A special and privileged moment to share in, every single time. [@JanMunro59](#)

Hearing hardworking nurses talk enthusiastically about working with people to improve their health and wellbeing. Small steps of care, compassion and commitment truly can make a difference. [@eilsalmon](#)

Knowing that my job is being a nurse, which is so much more than just a job. Nursing is a fulfilling way of life. [@CharlotteNHSRN](#)

Being able to make a difference. Working in a fabulous team with incredible children, young people and families. Every day is unique and I never stop being amazed by young people's courage and achievements. [@RobertshawJanet](#)

Taking care of a patient for months on intensive care who experts said would never wean off a ventilator and seeing them walk back in de-cannulated and maintaining their own airway after being admitted to a long-term ventilation centre. [@Rachhanks](#)

Being stopped by staff from one of our placement partners so they can tell me how fantastic, caring, compassionate, flexible and skilled our student mental health nurses are. [@VictoriaLsweet](#)

Knowing at the end of my shift I have made a positive difference to someone's life. [@Horn10Alison](#)

## Let's reclaim the image of nursing

Members Emma Matthews and Diana Greenfield consider how nursing can become a more gender-balanced profession

It's not immediately obvious how the statement "our future depends on men" aligns with feminism. Yet for nursing, it's true and supports a feminist ideal.

Nursing is steeped in stereotype. Simply look at any snapshot of pop-culture featuring nurses and you'll see. The extent to which we're defined by cliché undermines our achievements – our life-saving, life-affirming and life-enhancing achievements – and impacts our own self-portrayal. Gender in particular, and various tropes of femininity – sexy, surly, matronly – reinforce nursing as the professional extension of a "woman's place".

To improve the gender imbalance we see in nursing would not only hasten the

unravelling of our hackneyed image, but would subvert the toxic masculinity that stifles all genders. The toxic masculinity demanding that a man must be stoic, ruthless and proud, without space for humanity, sensitivity and nuance. We can celebrate the women who founded nursing, those who uphold and certainly those who advance it, while empowering men to join without stigma or raised brows.

As we recognise the necessity of a more gender-balanced workforce, let's be active in reclaiming our image and making it appeal to the young boys and bright girls who were advised to aim higher at school. Let's banish terms such as "sister" and "matron".

We cannot be what we cannot see, so let's ask our brilliant nurses to broaden the language and image that define us.

*International Women's Day is celebrated each year on 8 March. The theme this year is #BalanceforBetter, with the aim of celebrating the achievements of women while creating a more gender-balanced world.*

Visit [internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com)

## MESSAGE TO MEMBERS



**Sue Warner**  
Chair of RCN Council

I truly believe the RCN's biggest strength is you, our members. Not many organisations can say they have such a large membership. The RCN represents the biggest group of nursing staff in the UK but I know that we can only be the real voice of nursing if we know what you're experiencing, what you're passionate about and what you need.

As your new Chair of Council, one of my priorities is to make sure we're connecting with members in a meaningful way. A lot of work is going on around that and we're undertaking research to understand how you want to be communicated with so we can get better at it.

Although Council leads the College, we ask every single member to get involved in some way. That could be reading *RCN Bulletin*, going to a meeting, joining a forum, voting in our elections or tweeting your MP about an RCN campaign.

It's my job to make sure we offer something for everyone because this is your organisation and I want to make sure it's the organisation you need it to be. If you think we could improve on something, tell me. My ability to deliver on what you want depends on you telling me what that is. I'm really keen for members to contact me directly at [sue.warner@rcn.org.uk](mailto:sue.warner@rcn.org.uk) with any suggestions, concerns or feedback so we can have a conversation about that and deliver the changes you want to see.

[rcn.org.uk/council](http://rcn.org.uk/council)



# 8 FEATURES

## Members crucial to securing safe staffing law

READ MORE  
ONLINE  
[rcn.org.uk/  
bulletin](http://rcn.org.uk/bulletin)

Nursing staff will shape every aspect of our campaign for legislation in England

"I'm petrified of losing my PIN, not because I'm not a good nurse, but because we're under so much pressure due to lack of staff that mistakes could be made that have an impact on patient care."

These are Natalie's words. She qualified a year ago and is already questioning her future in the unit where she works. "I leave every shift feeling that I could have given better care if we had more staff," she says. Natalie's not alone. When we surveyed members about their last shift at work, shockingly, more than half said they felt care had been compromised because there were fewer nurses on shift than there should have been.

It's why the RCN's campaign on staffing for safe and effective care is so desperately needed and why we need your help to make sure it's a success. Over the past few years we've been collecting evidence and have come up with five key things we want a law to deliver in all four countries of the UK (see box right).

In England, we'll be building on what we've learned from our successful ongoing

campaigns in Wales and Scotland, and we'll be working alongside members to shape every aspect of the campaign. But how do you begin to tackle a problem this big when there are almost 41,000 nurse vacancies in England right now?

For Patricia Marquis, the Director of RCN England, it's about getting members to feel that they can do something, no matter how small, to drive change. "I know how passionate members are about this and harnessing this passion will be pivotal," she says.

In February, the first meeting to kick-off the campaign in England brought members, RCN reps and staff together to decide what can be done locally to make this an issue on everyone's radar. Chair of RCN Council Sue Warner told those attending that ensuring the campaign for safe staffing succeeds across the UK is her top priority. "Members have told us time and time again that this is what needs to happen in order for them to be able to give safe and effective care to patients," says Sue.

Patricia adds: "We can't stand back and allow our health services to deteriorate any longer because of something that is within our government's control. We need funding for nursing education and clear accountability for tackling the huge shortfall of nursing staff. We must come together to make this happen."

Making it happen involves lots and lots of members. Over the next few months campaign plans in each of the RCN's nine English regions will take shape, with members at the forefront of leading local action.

Danielle is one of them. "We need this campaign to be exciting, to empower people and to get them believing that this is a battle they can help win," she says. "There are so many ways we could drive this campaign, the most important thing is that members join in."

Make no mistake. The road to success won't be swift, and is likely to be bumpy. But as RCN President Anne Marie Rafferty says: "We are nurses and we will do this."

### What's happening across the UK?

#### So near but yet so far in Northern Ireland

There is no law for safe and effective nurse staffing in Northern Ireland but some progress was made before the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive in 2017. In 2014, following input from members, the Department of Health in Northern Ireland published a framework that set out plans to measure nurse staffing levels against patient outcomes, initially in certain adult hospital practice settings, for the first time. Progress has stalled because of the current political impasse and poor funding. Meanwhile, the number of vacant nursing posts continues to grow. Visit [tinyurl.com/ni-staffing-framework](http://tinyurl.com/ni-staffing-framework) to read about the framework.

#### Safe staffing law within reach in Scotland

The Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill was introduced in May last year. Through our *Ask for More* campaign members have influenced the bill as it has passed through parliament. The campaign has secured changes to strengthen the importance of reporting and accountability for staffing levels and has made sure the Scottish Government has responsibility for ensuring an adequate supply of nurses for the NHS. The bill now says senior charge nurses should not hold a caseload and nursing staff should have time for CPD. The bill is now due to enter the final stage of the parliamentary process. Visit [rcn.org.uk/askformore](http://rcn.org.uk/askformore)

#### Wales leads on legislation, now we want more

After 10 years of campaigning, members in Wales helped secure the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act which became law on 21 March 2016. It means health boards have a legal duty to regard the importance of ensuring appropriate levels of nurse staffing in all settings. On adult wards in NHS hospitals, an appropriate nurse staffing level must be maintained and action taken if staffing levels aren't met. Members continue to campaign for enough nurses to be educated and for the act to be extended to other areas. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-wales-staffing](http://tinyurl.com/rcn-wales-staffing) to watch a film on how members helped to secure the law.



“ We need legislation that defines what safe and effective care is



“ There's a fine line between being busy and working in an environment that's unsafe

“ I want to be able to protect our nurses and do something to make change happen

## What we want

The RCN is building its campaign for legislation in all parts of the UK. Though each country is on a different journey, our work is underpinned by five principles for ensuring nurse staffing for safe and effective care.

### NUMBERS

We want the right number of nurses, with the right skills, to be in the right place, at the right time – so patients' needs are met.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

We want it to be clear whose job it is to make sure there are enough nurses to meet patients' needs.

### STRATEGY

We want a vision for tackling nurse shortages and making sure nursing helps meet the whole country's health needs.

### PLANS

We want clear plans for getting the right numbers and skill mix of nursing staff and we want checks to make sure they really happen.

### EDUCATION

We want governments to educate enough nursing students, and develop existing staff, to meet patients' needs.

“ Members need to feel empowered. We must tackle the attitude that nothing will improve



“ We need to campaign for somebody to be responsible for what's happening in terms of staffing



Pictures by Gareth Harmer  
Words by Kim Scott

# 10 FEATURES

## Seven steps to speaking up about poor practice in your workplace

It's never easy to raise concerns about a colleague. But if you witness care that poses a risk to patients, you have a duty to tackle it head on. As an RCN member you're not alone. Learning and development facilitator Rachel Wood explains what to do

### 1 Read your local policy

Your employer will have a policy which explains the process for raising concerns internally or directs you to an outside specialist body such as Public Concern at Work.

In the first instance, read the policy so you can be sure you're following the right process. It will tell you who to speak to and what to do if you need to escalate your concerns.

### 2 Seek support as soon as possible

From the beginning, ask yourself: "Do I need some help here?"

You can speak to an RCN rep in confidence to discuss your concerns and seek their expert support and advice.

This can be invaluable as your rep will ensure you have the correct understanding of your workplace policy and guide you through the right process.

It's a good idea to speak to your RCN rep before you approach anyone else.

If you don't have a rep, don't know who they are, or don't feel able to approach them, you can call RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100 for support.

### 3 Consider whether you can talk to the person directly

If your concern is something minor that can be easily resolved, then you could approach your colleague informally.

If you do this, you will need to make sure it's followed through and results in change. It's still a good idea to read your employer's policy and seek support before doing this.

### 4 Escalate to more senior colleagues

If the concern is more serious or an informal chat isn't an option, then your employer's policy will outline who to speak to and in what order. You can also raise a concern in writing and the policy will tell you how.

### 5 Keep a log

Make sure that you keep a timeline and record your concerns and notes from any related conversations. However minor, it is important to keep a record as it could escalate at a later date. You could also complete a reflection so that you can learn from the situation. But remember, you must maintain patient confidentiality at all times.

### 6 Remember your contractual duty

Whatever your role, you probably have a contractual duty to speak up if you believe there is a risk to patient safety or public protection.

Members registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) will also have a professional duty.

When investigating errors or incidences of poor practice, the NMC may look at whether other staff could have known about these and not reported them.

It might be tempting to say that you didn't notice but if you choose to overlook something that results in patient harm, you could find yourself in difficulty with your employer and the NMC.

### 7 Know that you're doing the right thing

Challenging something is tough and takes courage.

But remember you're absolutely doing the right thing and you're doing what's expected of you as a member of the nursing profession. **There's no need to feel alone. Seek support from the RCN.**

“

It's normal to find it hard but to do nothing is not an option

📖 Read the RCN's full guide on raising concerns at [rcn.org.uk/publications](https://www.rcn.org.uk/publications) (code 005 841)

You can call RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100. Lines are open 8.30am to 8.30pm, 365 days a year.

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## Sally champions hand hygiene in Cambodian hospital



RCN member Sally Young has been a registered nurse since 1990. She served for 18 years in the Territorial Army, worked in emergency care for 17 years, and is a nurse practitioner. She has seen and done much as a nurse

Even so, when she went to Cambodia last year as part of a group of volunteers helping to drive improvements in clinical practice she was shocked by some of what she saw, particularly the poverty among patients in the hospital where she spent a week.

Cambodia is a proud nation with a terrible recent history. In the 1970s, the murderous regime of communist leader Pol Pot instigated genocide that left an estimated two million Cambodians dead.

Transform Healthcare Cambodia, the UK charity that arranged Sally's

trip, offers education, training and clinical expertise, principally in Battambang Province in Cambodia's north west. One of the charity's directors, Sue Smith, is Executive Chief Nurse at University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, where Sally is now a quality assurance matron.

### A challenging environment

Sally visited Battambang Hospital last November, part of a team of volunteer health professionals that included specialists in paediatrics, alcohol-liaison and emergency care. She was asked by the charity to undertake work around patient safety.

The experience was a "massive eye-opener", says Sally, a member of the RCN Professional Nursing Committee. "In Cambodia, they are no less caring than us, but it's a really challenging environment."

Battambang Hospital has about 200 beds – metal frames with thin mats on top. "Relatives sleep on the floor underneath because they're responsible for much of the nursing care and for feeding the patient."

People seeking treatment queue up at the hospital's door each morning. Patients are triaged and those who don't reach the front of the queue before the doors close at 5pm must return the following day.

### Shifting goalposts

Sally and her colleagues went to Cambodia with detailed plans for support they thought they might offer. But she says the goalposts shifted daily and instead they simply responded to the need they observed in the hospital. Infection control was among the priorities.

"We spent the second half of the week teaching basic hand hygiene," Sally says. "Although there were lots of big signs saying how important hand hygiene is, it was absolutely not embedded."

Sally is hoping that the action plan she devised with local staff, along with regular audit, will produce results. She says all the staff she encountered were exceptionally keen to learn from the UK visitors and to improve their practice.

Since returning from Cambodia, a further team of volunteers has visited Battambang Hospital. They've said that handwashing facilities are now installed in all clinical areas and the safety champion role Sally introduced is working well.

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Relatives are responsible for much of the nursing care



Words by Daniel Allen

### Volunteering internationally

Read our guide on doing humanitarian work at [tinyurl.com/rcn-humanitarian-work](http://tinyurl.com/rcn-humanitarian-work) or find out more about volunteering in Cambodia at [transformhealthcarecambodia.org.uk](http://transformhealthcarecambodia.org.uk)

## Reducing fear of health checks through desensitisation

Ellan explains how she makes adjustments for people with learning disabilities so they get the health care they need

Hospitals, GP surgeries, opticians and dentists – many health care settings are frightening places when you don't understand what's going on. Needles hurt. Tests are confusing. Someone messing with your eyes is extremely unpleasant.

So my job is to support adults with learning disabilities to get the treatment they need, such as health checks. I help them understand what's available and why it's important to attend appointments and tests.

My role is all about talking to people and making sure they understand what's going on. We shouldn't be surprised if people are uncooperative when they haven't had what's happening explained to them in a way they can understand.

A lot of my work is about communicating information in a simple way and making sure reasonable adjustments are made. Providing relevant easy-to-read information is important and using pictures is a great way to help people understand what's going to happen.

For example, if someone needs a blood test for an underactive thyroid and they've had a bad experience in the past, we need a specific care plan to make sure they get the test they need. I'm on hand to break down the process into small steps.

It can take a long time but we're often successful and that's what really matters.



Picture by Royston 'Stone' Naylor – Stonefree Photography

We always take the individual's needs into account. For some it's helpful to visit a GP surgery in advance and see the same practice nurse each time. In fact desensitisation is important in many scenarios like going to the dentist or getting nails cut.

### Helping people prepare

We found that practising with the equipment really helps too. One of my colleagues mocked up a needle – it was made of plastic but looked like the real thing, and using it has really helped the people we work with prepare for a range of treatments. It's all about getting used to the environment by looking at the machines before anything actually has to happen.

It worries me that many prospective nursing staff don't see working with people with a learning disability as an

interesting or rewarding career. We've seen a huge drop in the number of student nurses coming to us and recently we struggled to recruit to one of our nursing posts.

But I've worked with people with a learning disability for more than 19 years now and I wouldn't want to do anything else.

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We mocked up a needle made of plastic that looked like the real thing

**READ MORE ONLINE**  
[rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag](http://rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag)

*Ellan Corner is an assistant practitioner with Teignbridge Primary Care Liaison Team*

### 100 years of learning disability nursing

2019 marks a century since the first specific training certificate for learning disability nursing was introduced. This anniversary is cause for celebration but we also have huge concerns about the falling number of nurses working in the speciality.

The RCN Learning Disability Nursing Forum is leading a project this year to promote learning disability nursing to young people. We're also supporting Mencap's *Treat Me Well* campaign, which calls on NHS staff to make reasonable adjustments for people with a learning disability. Visit [mencap.org.uk/treatmewell](http://mencap.org.uk/treatmewell) or [rcn.org.uk/forums](http://rcn.org.uk/forums)

## Recipe for success

Making sure patients eat and drink well is essential for their recovery. Ahead of Nutrition and Hydration Week, Claire Campbell explains the important role of nursing staff

There'll be national conversations about the importance of food and drink from 11 to 17 March as part of the fifth annual Nutrition and Hydration Week. Nutritional knowledge is relevant in all nursing roles, but because food and drink are everyday considerations, they can be overlooked.

"It is everyone's responsibility and yet nobody's responsibility," says Claire Campbell, Nutrition Support Nurse Specialist and a member of the RCN Gastrointestinal Nursing Forum.

"Nursing staff can look at the bigger picture – what's going on with each individual patient. Their underlying condition, mental health and access to food all have an impact on their ability to maintain a healthy nutritional status."

Claire started her career in gastroenterology and noticed its connection with nutrition. Many gastroenterology patients also have nutritional issues and patients undergoing gastro-related surgery often need enteral feeding tubes, followed by support to use the tube at home or switch back to oral food. Now Chair of the National Nurses Nutrition Group, Claire hopes to forge closer connections between this and the RCN Gastrointestinal Nursing Forum to explore these links.

Claire currently works in a dedicated nutrition team at Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust. She supports nursing staff to address nutrition as part of patient care.

"We have such mixed messages about nutrition," she says. "On

the one hand, we have the obesity crisis and consequences of that on health. On the other hand, a significant number of people are malnourished, and that needs a whole different set of advice."

Nursing staff in hospitals and the community can often see what patients are eating and drinking.

They're in a position to discuss how this affects general health, but also address changing nutrition needs in times of ill-health and ethical questions around tube feeding.

Claire says: "If nursing staff felt more confident to speak to patients about food and drink and drill down into issues a bit further, that would potentially have a huge impact on patients' overall health and wellbeing."

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On the one hand, we have the obesity crisis. On the other hand, a significant number of people are malnourished

🕒 Find out more about Nutrition and Hydration Week at [nutritionandhydrationweek.co.uk](http://nutritionandhydrationweek.co.uk)

## New pocket guide for student children's nurses

Clinical placements are an essential part of nurse training, but can be daunting, especially for new student nurses.

The *Nursing Essentials* pocket-sized guide is a set of cards given to all first-year nursing students who join the RCN, to provide support during placements. Now, a new card has been added to assist children's nursing students and improve outcomes.

Designed by experienced members of the Children and Young People (CYP) forums and shaped by feedback from third-year Queen's University Belfast children's nursing students,

the card gives vital information quickly. It contains important blood values for infants, children and young people. This includes laboratory and monitoring ranges, a handy referenced checklist and links to online resources.

The guide follows recommendations from the inquiry into the hyponatraemia-related deaths of children in Northern Ireland.

This new card helps improve quality of care and safety by ensuring children's nursing students have accurate information about blood sodium levels and other important measurements at their fingertips.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT



### Procurement Network

#### Who's the Chair?

Unlike many other RCN forums, the Procurement Network does not have a chair. Instead, active members work together to organise initiatives and share information. Clinical procurement specialist and senior sister Michelle Winfield is one such member. She joined the forum when her head of procurement encouraged her to get involved.

#### Recent highlights?

The Procurement Network has been focusing on sustainability. The *Small Changes, Big Differences* campaign has helped to cut waste in a number of areas, including by standardising blood pressure cuffs and reducing reliance on disposable gloves. Now, Michelle and other members are working to cut plastic waste.

#### What's coming up?

The focus on reducing single-use plastics and plastic waste will continue. There will be a particular effort to cut the amount of plastics

used in operating theatres. Michelle and another forum member Harriet Dean-Orange will be leading initiatives in their workplaces.

The next *Small Changes, Big Differences* event is on 12 July in Plymouth, inviting nursing staff to listen to and share stories of success in making nursing greener.

#### Why join?

Michelle says: "The Procurement Network is helpful and professional. You can see what people are doing elsewhere, the information is amazing and it makes me feel part of a wider professional group so I don't feel so alone.

"My role in procurement requires me to balance cost with providing the best care so there are sometimes financial and ethical dilemmas I have to face. This is where the professional side of being a nurse shines through. The forum helps me to put projects in focus and supports my moments of doubt."

Find out more about the Procurement Network at [rcn.org.uk/forums](http://rcn.org.uk/forums) or visit their Facebook page.

## WHAT I'M THINKING



### Dr Susanne Cruickshank Cancer and Breast Care Forum Chair

Nursing staff communicate every day with people from all corners of society. What they say, when, and how is so important. The specific words used to communicate information can set the tone for the relationship that emerges between themselves and those they nurse.

For people affected by cancer, the use of language is extremely important, as highlighted in a recent survey of more than 2,000 people by Macmillan Cancer Support.

It affects how people feel and how they interact with others. Words associated with "battles", "fights" and "bravery" were viewed as particularly unhelpful and it made me reflect on how these words have crept quietly into the cancer vocabulary in recent times.

I have really noticed their use in the media. However, more worrying is their use in the titles of UK policy documents, such as "Beating cancer", and we should start questioning this.

I don't believe nursing staff set out to use inappropriate language but 8% of patients in the survey had heard health professionals say things that were unhelpful.

Being mindful of the language used in a clinical conversation, and asking patients about the terms they are comfortable with, is a simple action all nursing staff can take.

[rcn.org.uk/forums](http://rcn.org.uk/forums)



## Scrub up on infection prevention and control

Preventing infection is a central part of nursing, especially at a time when antibiotic resistance is a growing threat. The new RCN Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Module develops your clinical and leadership skills so you can help tackle the issue in your workplace. It's tailored for people in bands six or seven (or equivalent), in roles with a focus on IPC and offers a greater understanding of the evidence behind IPC practice and ways to implement positive change. The unique module involves three face-to-face sessions by leading experts, six coaching sessions and extensive online learning support. The module starts on 23 September 2019. Book now at [tinyurl.com/rcn-ipc-module](http://tinyurl.com/rcn-ipc-module)



# 16 EVENTS

For details of more events visit the region and country pages of the RCN website or go to [rcn.org.uk/events](http://rcn.org.uk/events)

## Sheffield

### Abstracts sought for global research conference

**3-5 September**  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Howard Street  
Sheffield S1 1WB

This annual conference brings together nursing researchers from all over the world to share their latest findings and discuss the impact of research on patient care. It features a keynote speech from Linda Aiken, whose pioneering research has created evidence of the importance of nurse staffing levels for safe and effective care, which was key to the development of a law in Wales.

Anyone with an interest in nursing research is invited to attend. There's still

time to submit an abstract to present at the conference too. "We welcome submissions from health professionals including student nurses, educators, practice developers, researchers, service users and carers," says Daniel Kelly, RCN Nursing Research Chair at Cardiff University.

"This includes those working in the NHS, private and voluntary sectors, universities and colleges. Presenting your own research at an event like this is a great opportunity to showcase your work on an international platform and share innovation in research."

🕒 The deadline for submitting an abstract is Friday 11 April. Visit [rcn.org.uk/research19](http://rcn.org.uk/research19) or call 02920 546 460



## Cardiff

### Celebrating creativity in nursing

**Friday 8 March 5-7pm**  
RCN Wales  
King George V Drive East  
Cardiff CF14 4XZ

This event, hosted by RCN Wales, celebrates the value of arts for health by highlighting writers and artists who work in nursing.

Olwen Morgan, singer and artist, will perform her work, while children's writer Michele Pengelly will talk about the value of creativity in nursing for young people.

RCN events and exhibitions manager Sarah Chaney says: "This will be a really fun and informal event and promises to show the diverse ways in which nursing staff make a contribution to society through creative as well as caring means."



🕒 Free and open to all. Book online at [nursingcreativity.eventbrite.co.uk](http://nursingcreativity.eventbrite.co.uk)

## Antrim

### Mental health seminar

**30 April 10am-1pm**  
Antrim Civic Centre  
50 Stiles Way  
Antrim BT41 2UB

This free morning seminar for general practice nurses aims to raise awareness of mental health issues.

It will help nurses in primary care get to grips with the range of mental health conditions their patients may present with.

It aims to develop their skills to improve communication with patients so they can direct them to appropriate services and treatment.

🕒 To book email [eventsreg@rcn.org.uk](mailto:eventsreg@rcn.org.uk) or call 02920 546 460.