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FOR NURSING STUDENTS ACROSS THE UK

AUTUMN/WINTER 2020



# 'BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE'

AWARD-WINNING STUDENT NURSE TEMITOPE  
ON HER INNOVATIVE WORK IN GHANA



Royal College  
of Nursing

# RCN Starting Out



**RCN Starting Out is a dedicated app and website, exclusively designed for RCN students and newly qualified nurse members.**

Whether you're about to start your nursing qualification, already studying or transitioning from being a student to a registered nurse, **RCN Starting Out** provides the latest knowledge, expertise and support straight to your phone or the web.

## Benefits of RCN Starting Out:

- Education and learning resources to help with your studies, placement and continued professional development.
- Support with professional and personal matters – including financial guidance, confidential counselling, career planning advice and much more.
- The UK's voice of nursing – learn more about our work as a trade union and professional body.
- RCN membership benefits – discover the various resources and services available to support your nursing journey.
- Manage your membership – easy access to keep your details up to date, so you never miss out.

Find out more at [rcn.org.uk/startingout](https://rcn.org.uk/startingout)



As I come towards the end of my time as student member of RCN Council, I want to thank you for your support, and for always keeping me on my toes.

I have learnt so much and been inspired by so many of you over the past two years.

What the last year has shown us is that student nurses are a force to be reckoned with. Whatever this pandemic has meant for you on your nursing journey, you're doing an awesome job and I have no doubt that the future of nursing is bright.

I encourage you to continue to stay engaged on the important issues – yes, I mean politics. Your voice is heard loudest when you vote for the people who you think will best represent you – so don't forget to vote in the upcoming elections for the RCN Students Committee and for your new student member of RCN Council (voting papers are included with this issue). Remember to network, ask questions, get involved and be kind to each other as we are all in this together.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find some stories that inspire you. Go well and keep fighting the good fight.

**Amy Fancourt**

Student member of RCN Council

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## Story to tell?

If you've got a story to share, or there's a topic you'd like to see covered in a future issue, why not get in touch?  
Email [studentsmagazine@rcn.org.uk](mailto:studentsmagazine@rcn.org.uk)

Did you know *RCN Students* is online?  
Read unmissable student stories, advice and guidance on the go, anywhere, any time. Visit [rcn.org.uk/studentsmag](http://rcn.org.uk/studentsmag)

## RCN help and advice

Our online practical guides cover a whole range of issues, including incidents at work, indemnity, bullying and stress. Visit [rcn.org.uk/get-help](http://rcn.org.uk/get-help) or call 0345 772 6100 to speak to an RCN Direct adviser.

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# 4 UPDATE

## Appy days

The RCN Starting Out app, aimed at nursing students and newly qualified nurses, is now here and provides knowledge, expertise and support from the RCN straight to your mobile or other device.

It includes information on education and learning resources; support with professional and personal matters; guidance on the role of the RCN; details of specific RCN membership benefits; and membership management, including easy ways to keep your personal details up to date.

The RCN Students Committee was involved in developing the app, offering feedback on content and testing it before it was launched. New features and content will be added to the app throughout the year. Visit [rcn.org.uk/startingout](https://rcn.org.uk/startingout)



## Always here for you

Got a question about COVID-19 and how it affects you? See our online advice for all the latest information on issues relating to the pandemic at [rcn.org.uk/covid-19-advice](https://rcn.org.uk/covid-19-advice). Staff at RCN Direct are also available to help provide the information you need at this challenging time. Our online advice guide is being continually updated in response to your queries and concerns. If you can't find what you're looking for, contact us online at [rcn.org.uk/get-help](https://rcn.org.uk/get-help) or call 0345 772 6100.



## Your learning

The RCN Library and Archive Service is developing its online training offer. "Following a number of successful group sessions over the summer, including ones on literature searching, we now have exciting plans for more," says Alan Chalkley, RCN Information Literacy Assistant. You can book training at [bit.ly/2DRdV9C](https://bit.ly/2DRdV9C) and access the e-library at [rcn.org.uk/library](https://rcn.org.uk/library)



Meanwhile, the RCN education team has been busy consulting with members on developing the RCN Group Education, Learning and Development Strategy for 2021-2024 as part of its commitment to support your lifelong learning. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-elds](https://tinyurl.com/rcn-elds)

## Join our fight for fair pay

**FAIR PAY  
FOR NURSING**

We've launched a campaign to demand fair pay for nursing in recognition of the complexity of skill, responsibility and experience demonstrated every day by members of the profession.

If you want to help show the UK government why we believe nursing staff deserve a 12.5% pay rise, get involved with our campaign today.

"Fair pay for nursing and proper funding for nursing

education is the only sustainable way to address the severe shortages in our profession," said Jess Sainsbury, Chair of the RCN Students Committee.

"We'll continue to fight for nursing student tuition fees to be abolished, for the debt of current nursing students to be forgiven, and for the introduction of maintenance grants that reflect actual student need."

Join us at [rcn.org.uk/fairpayfornursing](http://rcn.org.uk/fairpayfornursing)

## Your vote counts

Enclosed with this issue of *RCN Students* is your ballot paper for the election of the next student member of RCN Council, as well as information on each of the candidates. Make your voice



heard by returning your ballot paper as soon as possible via the prepaid envelope. Your paper needs to be received by 30 November to be counted so don't delay, vote today. Visit [rcn.org.uk/elections](http://rcn.org.uk/elections)

'Don't be afraid to speak up'



There was a time recently when I felt I was drowning in debt. My friend suggested writing to my local MP, Sarah Olney, as a last resort. I sent her a letter and didn't expect a reply. I couldn't believe it when someone called me back.

Sarah's office made an appointment for three weeks later. I was nervous as I'd never met a politician before. But I needn't have worried. Sarah was so kind and listened to me intently. A few weeks later I received a copy of a letter she had written to Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock, alongside two other MPs, highlighting my concerns. Reading the letter was like listening to every detail we discussed. It asked the government to directly reimburse student nurses for their final term of tuition fees.

Not in a million years did I think reaching out would get a result. It gave me faith that people do listen. As students, we need to get involved with politics – it affects us all. One listening ear may just create action which will blow your socks off.

*Theresa, international nursing student. Turn to page 8 for more on political influencing*

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## 6 GLOBAL NURSING

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# ‘Keep pushing yourself’

A placement in Ghana has led to national recognition for Temitope Babajide as she receives the accolade of being crowned RCNi nursing student award winner 2020



Image by  
Jonathan Perugia

For third-year nursing student Temitope, the chance to go to Ghana on a university elective placement was a once in a lifetime opportunity to help change lives in another part of the world.

Over the course of three weeks, Temitope embedded herself

in the local Takoradi Ghanaian community, not just as a visiting nursing student but by wholly immersing herself in the culture – learning some of the local language and arranging a sports event for the orphanage. But Temitope’s ambition to make an impact started before she even set foot on Ghanaian soil.

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To have the  
NHS is a  
privilege

Back home in the UK, in advance of the trip, Temitope gathered together books and pencils from friends, family and colleagues to take to the children at the orphanage, and arranged for resources to be shipped before she arrived.

Not long after landing and keen not to waste time, Temitope set up a widows' event, which included a health check, empowerment workshop and free lunch. Thanks to Temitope's hard work, and through access to health screening at the session, some women are now receiving appropriate treatment for underlying health conditions which had previously gone undetected.

### Big differences

When it came to the hospital environment, Temitope says she was struck by how different things were. "There were big differences between working in hospitals in Ghana and the UK, including limited resources, with doctors making difficult decisions about treatment options that were both appropriate and available," she explains. "To have the NHS is a privilege and I certainly appreciated it while I was in Ghana."

As well as the widows' event, Temitope hosted a glove awareness presentation at the local hospital using RCN materials. "I got in touch with

the RCN to use resources from a glove awareness conference I'd attended," she says. "Teaching the importance of hand hygiene will make a difference to the community and the nursing staff. I'm still in touch with them and they tell me they're benefitting from what I could share with them about our own practices."

Many student nurses take an elective placement in another country as part of their nursing degree course to pick up new skills and gain a fresh perspective, and for Temitope it's an experience she says she will carry with her throughout her future.

"The opportunity to go abroad and see so much in such a short space of time that you would never get to see or do in the UK is one you'll never forget," she says. "During my visit I was able to watch different procedures and practise a number of my own skills – taking vital signs, triaging patients and writing notes in A&E."

As Temitope moves from student to registered nurse, she hopes to continue to make a difference and eventually work in cancer care, something she was involved in during the COVID-19 pandemic as an NHS first responder.

So what's the key to Temitope's achievements? "I've been supported so well by my trust, university and the RCN. In all I've done, collaboration has been key," she enthuses. "The success of the project in Ghana is because of teamwork – a celebration of international collaborative working – from doctors to the shipping company who didn't take any money from me to ship resources to Ghana.

"For me, it's about self-development as well, pushing yourself to be the best you can be and going that further step to make a difference. One of my favourite quotes is 'be the change you want to see in the world'. To me, that is what nursing is all about."

### Rewarding talent

The RCNi Nurse Awards take place every year to celebrate the very best in nursing, from innovative projects to inspiring examples of patient care.

The virtual awards ceremony in October recognised the exceptional contribution of nursing staff across the UK. Visit [rcni.com/nurse-awards](https://rcni.com/nurse-awards)

# Every voice matters

Chair of the RCN Students Committee Jess Sainsbury talks about the importance of political engagement



Political engagement has been a huge part of my role as Chair of the RCN Students Committee. I feel a responsibility to stand up for your views and make sure that decision makers at every level hear from us about the issues that have an impact on us every day.

Often, it's been rewarding and at points, disheartening. But it's always felt like the right thing to do, to keep the momentum going behind our student-led Fund our Future campaign.

Most recently, Vice Chair of the committee Kendal Moran and I met with Minister for Care Helen Whately MP. She's responsible for workforce across health and care. This is the second meeting we've had with her and I know that in her previous role as a backbench MP she met other members in her constituency of Faversham and Mid Kent.

Kendal and I spoke to the minister about the different routes into nursing and the importance of giving every student across the UK the support they need to be able to afford to study.





I feel a responsibility to stand up for your views

We know that the number of nursing students beginning courses in England this September has increased by 22% – that’s an additional 4,600 new first-year students – but imagine the difference that no tuition fees and a maintenance grant, which truly reflects the cost of living, would have on helping everyone who wants to become a nurse afford to do so.

In England, we know we need additional financial support above and beyond what has already been announced. We won the first hurdle in securing modest training grants, but we need to continue to make the case to government for more.

### **Building relationships**

There’s no doubt that building relationships with your MP – wherever you live and study across the UK – is important, including those who don’t always agree with us, so that we can offer our unique perspective and work towards changing their minds.

Our elected representatives across all four countries must be given a

fair and equal chance to engage and support us. I remember at a recent local MP hustings, when quizzing candidates, they all supported nursing and the workforce no matter what party they were from. Each of them shared stories about how a nurse had touched their lives and expressed their appreciation of health and social care staff.

We have so much to share with our elected representatives. We are supporting care in hospitals, communities and in people’s homes. Many of us had our studies disrupted and were affected by decisions on paid clinical placements. I know all of you have a story to tell about life as a student nurse.

Without sharing our experiences, we won’t get the change we need or deserve. We can ask politicians to share our experiences in debates, in letters and in questions to ministers. Our real-life stories will give them the perspective they need when voting on decisions on funding our future nurses.

A quick and simple action from you could make a huge difference. You may feel like a tiny fish in a huge ocean but by getting in touch with politicians, be it via a tweet, email, letter, or in person (socially distanced of course) to share your story, you will be helping the nursing workforce and our call for funded nursing education and support for all, across the UK.

Every action and every voice matters. Be part of the change.

## **Fund our future**

The RCN’s Fund our Future campaign is calling on the government to provide full tuition fee support and maintenance grants which cover the true cost of living for all nursing students in England.

Find out more and how to become an e-campaigner at [rcn.org.uk/fundourfuture](https://rcn.org.uk/fundourfuture)

## Protect your hands

Our new resources help you look after your skin while you're on placement or entering clinical practice

The COVID-19 pandemic began with instructions for everyone to wash their hands. If you're starting out in clinical practice or currently on a placement, the extra handwashing, alcohol rub and glove use could mean your skin is suffering.

A recent RCN survey found that 93% of nursing staff had experienced some form of skin condition, including dryness, redness, cracking, itching and pain, in the previous year. We've now launched a new set of resources filled with advice on hand hygiene, glove use and when to seek support. There's also an online learning module about the skin condition dermatitis.

"The COVID-19 crisis has thrown light on the importance of protective equipment for nursing staff," says Rose Gallagher, RCN Professional Lead for Infection Prevention and Control. "When there is regular, prolonged use of this protective equipment, including gloves, nursing staff

need to continue to take care of their skin health to prevent long-term damage."

### Hand health

On placement, your skin may come into contact with lots of irritants, which could cause hand health issues. Our survey revealed that dryness is the most common symptom, with 90% of respondents experiencing this. Around two-thirds of people experienced redness, itching and cracking of the skin.

These can all be signs of dermatitis, the main work-related skin condition affecting the hands of nursing staff. Infection prevention and control measures, such as handwashing, alcohol gel and glove use can all cause or worsen dermatitis.

Meanwhile, damaged skin can prevent effective hand hygiene,



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Nursing staff need to take care of their skin health to prevent long-term damage

### Remember and report

Under health and safety law, your placement provider should have a programme of skin checks to reduce the risk of work-related dermatitis. If you need further support, contact your placement provider, local RCN safety rep or call RCN Direct on **0345 772 6100**.

so it's extra important to check for signs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, you should seek help and advice from your placement provider or your GP.

### Be glove aware

"Even in normal times, far too often gloves are worn when they're not necessary," says Rose. "This can have a real impact on skin health. In the current circumstances



we are all being extra vigilant about hygiene but using gloves should not be seen as a replacement for good hand hygiene."

It is important to assess when to use gloves – both

### Top tips for hand health

- Wet hands thoroughly before applying soap.
- Rinse off all soap when washing hands.
- Dry hands thoroughly after washing – pat skin with a soft paper towel where possible and avoid hand dryers if you can.
- Apply moisturiser containing emollient to hands regularly.
- Stay hydrated.
- Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene. Over-use can put you at risk of dermatitis.

under and overuse of gloves can put you at risk of dermatitis. Gloves should be worn if you're in contact with blood, body fluid, broken skin, or mucous membranes. They're also needed if there's a chance of chemical hazards, such as disinfectants or cytotoxic drugs, touching your hands.

Only put gloves on when your hands are completely dry and remove them when the task that required them is complete. Remember, gloves are single-use items so they should be changed between each patient or care task.

### Using personal protective equipment (PPE)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be using other forms of PPE,

such as gowns, overalls, eye protection and face masks.

Public Health England recommends only wearing PPE for two-hour stretches so your skin can dry and recover (this does not apply to gloves). Regular breaks will also allow you to rehydrate and apply moisturiser containing emollients to the points where your PPE touches your skin.

Masks that have been fit tested are less likely to damage your skin. Even if you have been fit tested, check your skin regularly for any signs of redness, soreness or cracking. If you spot any, report this to your placement provider.

Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-ppe-skin-health](https://tinyurl.com/rcn-ppe-skin-health) for more information.

# ‘Put yourself in their shoes’

Mitchell Richards says that if you get it right for a person with a learning disability, you get it right for everyone

Having to go to hospital is pretty frightening for everyone. I can't imagine anyone looks forward to it, even if it's planned. When admitted, I want everyone to have the same level of care as I would get.

I want this for all my patients, but I also want it for my brother, Nathan. We come as a duo. Everything we do is “half each”. He just happens to have a learning disability.

I've always been passionate about providing excellent care for people with a learning disability but when I started my nurse training in 2016 I chose to study mental health to broaden my knowledge. I still wanted to share my experience with others though, and I was determined to champion the needs of individuals with a learning disability across all health care sectors.

I believe basic information on how to communicate with and care for people with a learning disability needs to be taught on all university courses and included in our mandatory training.

The year I started my nurse training I met with representatives of the Paul Ridd Foundation for the first time. Its founders established the charity in memory of their own brother who had a learning disability and was failed by the system. They shared my desire to educate others about making reasonable adjustments for people with a learning disability.

They were already pushing their learning disability champion programme onto hospital wards, but I supported the foundation in delivering the programme to nursing students for the very first time. My fellow students in Swansea were enthusiastic about this and we ran training sessions every few months. The places were always filled. It was such a success that Swansea University has now pledged to train every nursing student as a learning disability champion, with training sessions currently taking place online.

### **COVID-19 challenges**

Understanding the concept of a pandemic can be very hard

for people with a learning disability. I'm now working in an assessment unit providing treatment for patients with a learning disability and mental health issues. We've had to adapt quickly.

Video calls have helped some who were anxious about being separated from their family. Others missed their regular routines, such as going out for a coffee once a week. One patient has been particularly affected. To reduce his anxiety about this, he now goes to our new coffee machine instead, and uses Costa cups we managed to source. It's not perfect, but it does help.

Whether or not there's a pandemic, we all just need to remember that people with a learning disability are the same as us. Yes, they have different needs – but we all do. Put yourself in their shoes and make sure you actively listen. It's difficult for people with a learning disability to understand the world around them, now more than ever, so be aware, be patient, and be generous with your time.



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Be aware,  
be patient,  
and be  
generous  
with your time

**READ  
MORE  
ONLINE**

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

Join the RCN Learning  
Disability Forum at  
[rcn.org.uk/forums](http://rcn.org.uk/forums)

*Image by Stuart Fisher*

# Supporting women through abortion

Abortion care isn't a staple on many nursing degrees, but a new placement programme aims to give students a vital insight



*Image by  
Gareth Harmer*

“Before I started this placement I had no idea about Marie Stopes UK and sexual health clinics, I knew nothing about abortion. Now I feel so much more knowledgeable,” says Ozlem Top (pictured right) who, with fellow King’s College London course mate Trishnu Thakali, is in the second group of pre-registration nursing students to complete placements at the Marie Stopes UK clinic in West London.

“It was the same for me—it was a completely new experience with different opportunities,” says Trishnu (pictured left).

Back in September 2019, NICE published updated guidance on abortion care, recommending that anyone who may care for someone who requests an abortion should have the chance to gain experience of abortion services during their training.

### **A common procedure**

“We wanted to offer students a chance to experience an area of health care that is not included as a core part of any major pre-registration courses for nursing or midwifery,” says Angela Jones, Clinical Educator at Marie Stopes UK. “However, it is a very common procedure – one in three UK women will have an abortion by the age of 45. Although some students may gain a

little experience on a gynae placement, a placement with us offers the chance to understand abortion as health care, and to explore the emphasis we give to emotional support and to safeguarding every client we care for.”

Marie Stopes UK is a charity that provides NHS-funded and self-funded abortion care, alongside counselling, contraception and vasectomies. Nursing students on placement have the chance to learn about all of these areas, including taking part in face-to-face safeguarding training and observing counselling calls.

Angela says: “They see the full scope of our work: pre-assessments, consents for surgical procedures, working in the treatment room and in the post-op recovery area, and caring for women undergoing early medical abortion. They really get the feeling of supporting these women through often quite a long journey.”

Having the chance to care for women through the different stages of treatment was important for Trishnu and Ozlem. “Being able to follow a client’s journey from start to finish is really good,” says Trishnu. “The staff create this safe environment for them to open up or see if there’s any safeguarding issues, which is amazing.”

Ozlem says: “You have the opportunity to observe pretty much everything in the clinic. I’ve had most of my previous placements in hospital and this is completely different.”

### Fully supported

Both students also felt supported by staff at the clinic. “The practice supervisors and practice assessors help you and give you opportunities in different fields within the clinic. The fact the mentors ask what you want to get out of the placement is great,” says Trishnu.

“It’s very much tailored to what the student needs to achieve,” says Angela. “The vast majority of the care we give here is nurse-led, and to have that autonomy was something the students loved – they hadn’t experienced that so much in more traditional placement settings.”

Ozlem and Trishnu say they’ve been inspired by their placement and are both keen to work in this area of health care. “Being able to come here allowed me to

develop my knowledge about abortion and the medical aspects of contraception,” Trishnu says. “The team members are all working together to make this clinic the best place for those who want to have an abortion in the right way.”

Ozlem agrees: “Especially as a Muslim, it’s rare to see Muslim females and Muslim males come to clinics for an abortion. Now that I’ve had this opportunity, I can also spread the word, letting them know that you can make your own choice.”

Ozlem and Trishnu undertook their placements prior to the start of the pandemic, however Marie Stopes UK ([mariestopes.org.uk](http://mariestopes.org.uk)) has continued to support students throughout, working closely with King’s College London and Health Education England to provide placements over the summer. Marie Stopes UK is now further developing the programme and working with a range of universities to provide practice placements in centres across the country.

### Compassionate care

The RCN aims to support its members in providing the very highest standards of compassionate care for women who choose to have a termination of pregnancy. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcnwomenshealth](http://tinyurl.com/rcnwomenshealth) for our latest guidance and resources.

## Boost your mind and body

It can be difficult to live healthily as a student, but it's essential you eat the right food for work and study. Nutritional therapist Nicola Moore shares her top five tips



Stock image

### 1. Prepare

My biggest tip is to prepare meals in advance. We know shift working can disrupt our body's circadian rhythms, the body's natural internal clock that helps us to sleep, be alert and function efficiently. Making wise food choices can help our natural rhythms and is a lot easier than you think. Grab a load of vegetables – broccoli, sweet potato, courgette – anything you like – and roast in the oven for around 20 minutes. Keep in an airtight container in the fridge. This will stay fresh for over a week and can be used in a variety of ways. Add to salads, pair with a tin of tomatoes for a quick pasta sauce or ratatouille or roast a chicken and add as a side dish. It's a great way to ensure there's always something to hand to avoid reaching for sugary snacks that lack nutrients.

### 2. Protein

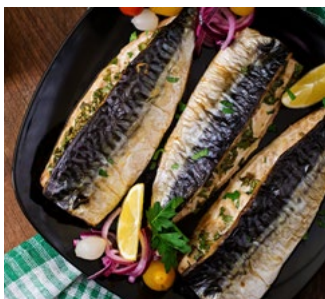
Proteins are essential for our immune system, they help us with energy and stop us snacking as they fill us up for longer. All meat, eggs, lentils, chickpeas, beans and green leafy vegetables are rich in protein.





### 3. Omega 3 fats

We shouldn't fear natural fats, which help with brain function. Good sources of natural fats include fish such as tinned mackerel,



walnuts, avocado and other nuts and seeds. Add mackerel to the cooked veg you prepare with a handful of nuts and you've got a very quick, tasty and healthy lunch.

### 4. Superfoods

No food is "bad", but some foods really do aid wellbeing and health. My number one superfood is broccoli. It's full of vitamins, can be eaten in salads or as part of a main meal (for example, add to salmon and new potatoes), and is great at detoxifying the body.

### 5. Water

Hydration is key. Nursing staff advocate being hydrated for patients, and this is because it's proven to aid cognitive thinking and brain function. Drinking a glass of water will do more for your concentration and energy than a sugary snack or a caffeinated drink.

## Amy's choice: BBC Good Food's Healthy Shakshuka

Amy Fancourt, student member of RCN Council, says: "Shakshuka is one of my favourite dishes. It also tastes good without eggs and can be refrigerated or frozen before adding the eggs and eaten with cous cous, rice, pasta or on its own with some naan bread."

#### Serves 2

1 tbsp cold pressed rapeseed oil  
 1 red onion, cut into thin wedges  
 1 red pepper, finely sliced  
 1 yellow pepper, finely sliced  
 3 large garlic cloves, crushed  
 1 tsp cumin seeds  
 1 tsp coriander seeds, crushed  
 1 heaped tsp sweet smoked paprika  
 400g can cherry tomatoes  
 115g baby spinach  
 4 medium eggs  
 ½ small bunch coriander, roughly chopped  
 ½ small bunch dill, roughly chopped

#### Step 1

Heat the oil in a large, non-stick frying pan. Add the onion and peppers and fry over a medium heat for 8-10 mins until the veg is beginning to soften. Add the garlic, cumin, coriander and paprika and fry for 1 min more. Tip in the tomatoes, spinach and 100ml water and bubble until the spinach has wilted, then lower to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for 10 mins. Season to taste.

#### Step 2

Make four indentations in the tomato mixture and gently crack an egg into each one. Cover with a lid or foil and cook over a gentle heat for 8-10 mins, or until the eggs are just set. Uncover, scatter with the fresh herbs and serve.

Recipe taken from BBC Good Food. For more, please visit [bbcgoodfood.com](http://bbcgoodfood.com)



## Towards a greener future

With the focus on COVID-19, it's crucial we don't leave climate change on the backburner. Student Kendal Moran writes about the vital role nurses of the future have to play in the fight for our world

I have recently been thinking a lot about sustainability, climate change and nursing, and the connections between them – spurred on by writing about my top five podcasts for *RCN Students* online, “Audio for the mind and soul”, which you can read at [rcn.org.uk/studentmag](http://rcn.org.uk/studentmag)

My final podcast recommendation wasn't in the field of nursing, health or wellbeing like the others on my list, but about climate change. At the time I said it was the wild card as it wasn't directly related to nursing, however, the more I think about the topics, the more I am sure that they are intrinsically linked.

There is now no denying that human activity is changing the planet's biosphere, bringing disruption to planetary health through climate change, air pollution, ocean acidification, and deforestation. This is already affecting and will continue to affect our patients' health and wellbeing to a greater degree year on year. Be this through air pollution adversely affecting pulmonary conditions, resource scarcity leading to malnutrition, or the fear and anxiety provoked by an uncertain future affecting mental health.

This list is not exhaustive – the natural world and our climate affects our physical and mental health in a myriad of ways as I am sure your public health lecturers have repeatedly told you. Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) has described climate change as the defining health challenge of our time.

### Never too late

Unless drastic measures are taken, climate change will fundamentally alter the world in which future humans will live. However, it is not too late – we can make individual and organisational changes to our everyday lives to create a beautiful green future for everyone.

Understanding this, RCN Congress 2019 voted in favour of an emergency resolution to acknowledge the climate emergency and lobby health care providers to develop policies and strategies that are environmentally sustainable. Since then work has been done to make the RCN itself more sustainable, build relationships with external organisations like the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, and start initiatives to improve the sustainability of nursing practice,



Engagement with this topic is paramount

🔗 Read about why sustainability matters in health and care, and what the RCN is doing at [tinyurl.com/rcngreenworkplace](http://tinyurl.com/rcngreenworkplace)

Read the RCN's position statement on climate change at [rcn.org.uk/publications](http://rcn.org.uk/publications) (pub code: 007878)



with campaigns like Glove Awareness Week. The RCN Students Committee has also resolved to become more involved in work in this area.

But, should this be a concern for nurses on an individual level? I would argue yes. Nurses have a duty to protect and promote health in the face of these threats and have a unique and vital role to play. As students the issue is even more vital – as the future of the workforce we will see and feel the cumulative effects of climate change on population health as it worsens. Our engagement with this topic is therefore paramount. It can be difficult to know what you can do to help such a huge issue on

an individual level. Where to start, you ask? Start by getting informed, spreading the word, and making small changes. Even the smallest ones can have great impact.

There is of course currently another threat to global health: COVID-19. This is a serious threat and, although it distracts us from the climate conversation, it also provides an opportunity to make changes to our everyday lives which will help us avert the climate crisis. This can be achieved through something which has been described by WHO as the “healthy recovery”. Find out more at [tinyurl.com/whohealthyrecovery](https://tinyurl.com/whohealthyrecovery) and search [#healthyrecovery](https://twitter.com/healthyrecovery).

At the end of each episode of the podcast that galvanised my writing on this, the hosts ask their guests: “Are you mostly outraged or optimistic about the climate crisis?”. Before writing these words I was mostly outraged – why don’t people care as much as I do? However, after researching the work being done in this area, noting the international attention it has received in recent years, and understanding that we can make a difference on an individual level, I am leaning towards optimism.

*Kendal, RCN Students Committee Vice Chair, also represents students on the RCN Professional Nursing Committee*

# Improving dementia care

Final-year nursing student Stephanie Craig writes about her passion for supporting people living with dementia and her involvement in a project to help improve public perception of the disease



*Stock image*

People living with dementia face many challenges throughout their illness. One of the biggest challenges relates to public misconceptions about dementia, and this can be disempowering.

Just because someone lives with the disease, it doesn't mean they can't do things like drive, manage money, or have romantic relationships. As dementia progresses,

each person will encounter unique challenges and these can affect people emotionally, physically and practically.

Caring for people with dementia is about seeing the person behind the illness and helping them to actively live their life in the here and now. It's also about empowering and facilitating people to take control of what they can still do and

provide support for things that are more difficult.

As nursing students, we have first-hand experience of some of the best ways to do this – but not all people living with dementia regularly see nurses or health care professionals. It is therefore very important that family members, carers and the general public have good knowledge about how best to support them.

## Digital game

I am proud to have been involved in a project which seeks to improve public perception of dementia. A key part of the project was developing a free digital game. It aims to help improve society's awareness so that people with dementia feel empowered, supported and included in their local communities.

Along with a research team, a gaming company, five other nursing students and my lecturer, we worked alongside seven people living with dementia to co-design the game. My role was to work with all these individuals to help actively decide how the game would look, how it would play and what questions needed to be asked within the game.

To our knowledge this is the first game of its type. It works

## Did you know?

Dementia is a term that is used to describe a collection of symptoms including memory loss, problems with reasoning, perception and communication skills. It also leads to a reduction in a person's abilities and skills in carrying out routine activities such as washing, dressing and cooking.

By 2025 it is expected that more than one million people will be living with dementia in the UK.

Dawne Garrett, RCN Professional Lead for Older People and Dementia Care, says: "What a great idea the dementia game is and a clever use of digital education. It's brilliant to see students so engaged and involved in developing something like this which is easily accessible to benefit all."

Discover a range of RCN resources on dementia at [rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/dementia](https://rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/dementia)

on any device through a web browser and only takes a few minutes to play. Players answer random questions from an existing question bank about dementia. The idea is that the more times you play, the more you'll learn about dementia.

At my university, Queen's University Belfast, all nursing students are encouraged to play the game in their first year of study. The game has now been played more than 3,000 times and research conducted by the university on its impact shows that after playing the game, a person's attitudes to people living with dementia improve.

Whether you are a nursing student, a registered nurse, a health care professional, or a person who looks after someone with dementia, I invite you to take a couple of minutes to play our free game. It might just change how you think about people living with dementia. Go to [dementiagame.com](https://dementiagame.com)



Stock image

## 22 YOUR COMMITTEE

### What we're working on

Hi all, it's been a turbulent year and we recognise it's far from over. With a second wave of COVID-19 upon us, and – at the time of writing – local lockdowns in place, nurse education programmes across the country at different stages, and variable placement experiences, we need to stick together. Please know you have a whole network of support via your RCN family, from your local branch to your national students committee. Please reach out if you need us. *Jess Sainsbury, RCN Students Committee Chair*

#### Committee priorities 2020

Our priority, first and foremost, is to support student members in a way that is courageous and inclusive. We encourage all members to optimise their RCN membership and seek professional resources and support to complete their nursing education to the best of their ability.

#### Ambassador conference

On 16 November the RCN Student Ambassador Conference is going virtual. Like most events this year, we've had to be imaginative with our hosting skills but it was very important to the committee that we recognised the contribution of our student ambassadors and provided them with this important learning opportunity. [#RCNSA](#)

#### Campaigning

Unless you were nose deep in a literature review, you wouldn't have missed the comments from Minister for Care Helen Whately on "student nurses not providing a service". Your students committee invited the minister for an open and frank discussion



on the role of student nurses in health and social care. These will now be regular meetings where your representatives will be able to take your nursing student issues directly to the minister. Get involved by checking out the [#FairPayForNursing](#) and [#FundOurFuture](#) campaigns.

#### Social media

We regularly release updates and opportunities via our social media pages. You can find us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. This is a quick and easy way for you to get in touch with your student committee member, and network with other nursing students. [#RCNStudents](#)

#### Global nursing

The committee has a close relationship with the European Nursing Students Association (ENSA), and this year hosted their annual conference and AGM. It is vital we are up to date on nurse education in other countries. There are plenty of opportunities for student nurses to contribute to the global nursing agenda. Ask us if you're not sure where to start. [#WeAreGlobalNurses](#)

**RCN ELECTIONS:**  
Vote today - find your  
ballot paper included  
with this issue and see  
[rcn.org.uk/elections](http://rcn.org.uk/elections)

## Your RCN Students Committee

### Representing you



**Jess Sainsbury (Chair)**  
South East



**Amy Fancourt**  
Student member of RCN Council



**Kendal Moran (Vice Chair)**  
Professional Nursing Committee



**Heather Massie**  
Trade Union Committee

### Country and regional representatives



**Vacant**  
Eastern



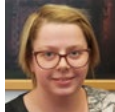
**Molly Kiltie**  
East Midlands



**Vanessa Anthony**  
London



**Scott Doughty**  
Northern



**Marie Cairns**  
Northern Ireland



**Lynsey McLaughlin**  
Northern Ireland



**Sam Turner**  
North West



**Dawn Marr**  
Scotland



**Ben Barclay**  
Scotland



**Lucia Assirati**  
South West



**Duncan Warren**  
Wales



**George Cade**  
Wales



**Rajneet Kaur**  
West Midlands



**Olatunde George**  
Yorkshire & the Humber

### What does the committee do?

The RCN Students Committee is led by students for students, and makes the student voice heard on the issues that matter to you. The committee reports directly to RCN Council – the RCN's governing body, which provides leadership and direction for the organisation, helping to shape the future.



### Get in touch

Contact your student committee representative at [students@rcn.org.uk](mailto:students@rcn.org.uk)

**"THE CREW  
LOOK AFTER  
THE SHIP, I  
LOOK AFTER  
THE CREW"**



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