

# Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists



## Stimulating debates, dancing and dogs were among the highlights at RCN Congress in Belfast this year

RCN President Cecilia Akrisie Anim kicked off the event in spectacular style with a rousing speech in which she declared “nursing is rocking all over the world”.

She urged members to unite against the challenges facing the profession and to “try, try and try again” to ensure the voice of nursing is heard. The opening ceremony saw members honoured for their exceptional contributions to nursing and the RCN (see page 3) and culminated in dancing led by Cecilia on stage.

Discussions the following day took on a more sombre tone, with safe staffing and nursing pay dominating debates in the main hall. “We must stop this,” insisted RCN Chief Executive Janet Davies in her keynote speech as she referred to the vicious cycle of staff shortages leading nursing staff to leave the profession.

Other debates proved contentious. The idea of introducing body cameras to protect health care staff was dismissed as being unethical and members voted against proposals to develop a strategy to recruit more men into nursing.

Keynote speakers were popular with economist Will Hutton urging members to consider the impact of Brexit on health care workers and author Christie Watson reducing the audience to tears with tales of poignant moments that have shaped her definition of the profession. “Nursing saves us,” she said. “It is the most important job in the world.”

Outside the hall it was medical assistance dog Magic who was among the biggest draws of the fringe programme. Helping to launch the RCN’s new protocol on how to introduce animals into health care settings safely, Magic demonstrated just how vital dogs can be in monitoring glucose levels. Catch up with all the Congress action at [www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin)

## Janet announces launch of safe staffing campaign



In her keynote speech at Congress, Chief Executive Janet Davies said the RCN is to launch a major campaign to demand safe staffing levels and accountability set in law for every part of the UK.

The campaign this autumn will be informed by experts with the aim of extending existing laws and introducing new ones where needed.

Though nurse staffing legislation already exists in Wales, and Scotland is on a path to enshrine safe levels in law, Janet was adamant about going further.

“We need it in every country to empower nurses, contribute to safer care and better clinical outcomes for our patients,” she said.

The speech was delivered on the day a new RCN poll revealed the extent of public concern over nurse staffing levels. It showed that three out of four people in the UK think there aren't enough nurses to care safely for patients in the NHS.

Read an extended report on Janet's speech at [www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin)

## Time running out to vote on pay deal

### There's only a few days left for members to have their say on whether to accept or reject the NHS pay deal for England

Voting closes on 5 June with the RCN Trade Union Committee set to deliberate results in the days following.

As was to be expected, nursing pay was a hot topic at Congress where the first emergency debate scrutinised the success of the RCN's summer of protest and the NHS pay deal for England which resulted from it. Impassioned members spoke both for and against the proposed offer.

Sam Newman strongly felt that “while it isn't perfect, it is a significant step in the right direction that will help lift our lowest paid colleagues out of poverty.”

On the other hand, Sarah-Jane Clarke reminded Congress of the Scrap the Cap campaign slogan “hear us roar” and felt that there was more roaring to be done to ensure nurses were valued.

Student Alice Duncan urged members to “use their vote and help students to have their voices heard”, stressing that the nursing voice should always be “dignified, professional and passionate.”

That sentiment was echoed by Jason Warriner, Chair of Forum Chairs, who reminded Congress that while it is important for everyone to have their say, it is equally important to remain respectful of differing views. “Whatever your opinion on the pay deal, we must continue to stand together as one professional body and one professional voice,” he said.

Have your say at [www.rcn.org.uk/nursing-pay](http://www.rcn.org.uk/nursing-pay)

## Tackling the gender pay gap

In March, all public sector employers with more than 250 members of staff were required to publish their gender pay gap reports. Some NHS employers reported a gender pay gap of nearly 40% which is much higher than the national average of 18.4%.

Though the figures are quite shocking, it's important not to confuse this with pay inequality. There is legislation to protect equal pay for equal work (see page 5).

What the figures do point to is a lack of equality across the NHS hierarchy with more men occupying senior positions and women more likely to be found in lower paid roles.

Without seeing separate reports for nursing staff, it's impossible to comment specifically on the implications for the profession but anecdotal reports show that a lack of development and flexible work opportunities are significant barriers to advancement.

### What can reps do?

Your employer's gender pay gap report should have been shared with you and discussed at your partnership forum or JNC meeting.



It should certainly be published on the organisation's website. If not, ask why.

The report itself is just one aspect of this issue. Any action plans to redress the gaps identified should be drawn up in partnership.

Given the difficulties in identifying gaps in occupational groups, if your employer hasn't undertaken separate reports, you could lobby for them to do so.

Learning reps can work with their employer to ensure that development opportunities are equally accessible, including to those who work part-time or flexibly, and track how these might help address gender pay gap actions.

## Award-winning activists



### The dedication and commitment of RCN activists was marked during an awards ceremony at Congress

The RCN Representative of the Year Awards go to safety reps, stewards, and learning reps who have made a real difference in their workplace. An award was also given to our Student Information Officer of the Year.

The Learning Representative of the Year Award was given to Vanessa Davies from Eastern region. At the ceremony, RCN Chief Executive Janet Davies described Vanessa as having an “infectious passion” for learning. She has given her local branch meetings a stronger educational focus and made them more accessible by moving them round the county.

Kenny McNeil was named Steward of the Year. Kenny has been a steward on Jersey since 2002 and has supported hundreds of RCN members. Examples of his innovative approach include

arranging for students to watch a live stream of Congress from their lecture theatre and launching a branch ambassador role.

Daniel Gooding (pictured) is Student Information Officer of the Year. Commended in the same category last year, Daniel, from the RCN London region, was praised for showing “incredible commitment”. His peers say he always takes the initiative and uses students’ feedback to devise ways of encouraging members to be more engaged.

The Safety Representative of the Year Award was going to go to Catherine Slater from Wales, who is highly regarded for her efforts in making the workplace safer for all, but she recently became an RCN staff member meaning she was no longer eligible to receive the award.

Read more about our winners in the story “Congress opens in Belfast” at [www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin)

## Spice epidemic puts prison nursing staff at risk

The RCN is set to meet with the head of the prison service after members working in UK prisons have reported suffering from the effects of inhaling psychoactive fumes from the drug spice.

Nursing staff are often first on the scene when prisoners need emergency care and current guidance suggests that they’re expected to enter

cells before the smoke from prisoners smoking spice has cleared.

RCN Chief Executive Janet Davies said: “We want an urgent review of the guidance that properly reflects the risks posed by this extremely dangerous drug.”

Turn to page 7 to find out more.

## Safety should be personal

This year’s John Goodlad memorial lecture at Congress was led by Jen Deeney, the first ever nurse to deliver the session.

Following the tragic death of her husband 14 years ago after a workplace accident that could have been avoided had there been more due diligence, Jen began campaigning to raise awareness of the importance of health and safety in the workplace.

“We all come to work for the same reasons, to look after our families and have a nice life,” said Jen in her moving lecture. “There shouldn’t be a risk of not returning home because of short cuts, not following processes, or not challenging potential safety issues.”

Jen urged her nursing colleagues to extend their care to each other and make sure to “look out for one another” in the workplace.

## Congress covered



Can’t get enough of Congress?

Head over to [www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congressdailybulletin) for exclusive online features including a chat with Christie Watson, in-depth coverage from some of our most lively debates and photo galleries from each day.

You can still watch all of the debates from Congress in full at [www.rcn.org.uk/congress](http://www.rcn.org.uk/congress) and you can even register for next year’s event in Liverpool from Sunday 19 to Thursday 23 May 2019.

## The end of an era



*“It’s been a remarkable journey and one I’m very proud of”*

**As Stuart McKenzie moves on from being Chair of Congress, he reflects on his involvement with the RCN’s flagship event and what it’s meant for him both personally and professionally**

Helping to organise and run Congress has been part of my life for the past 12 years. It’s been a remarkable journey and one I’m very proud of but now is the right time to move on.

Being Chair of Congress has done so much for me. When I started out I wasn’t a leader, I was a nurse and a trade unionist, a guy who grew up in a high rise flat in Glasgow. The role has made me much more reflective as a nurse but I’ve been myself throughout.

I hope I’ll be remembered as someone who listened, who tried to promote respect and inclusivity and who allowed people to have their say in the right way.

I also hope I’ve inspired others to want to do the role, to look at me and think “goodness, I could do that”.

I do feel a little sad but it’s bittersweet for me. As an RCN activist, you give a lot of yourself to the organisation and it’s perhaps your family and personal life that suffers. I’m looking forward to being a dad and taking some time out for a while.

I’m really proud of what I’ve achieved. Being Chair of Congress has been a privilege and an honour. It’s been a rare experience and one I’ll look back on fondly.

## ASK AN ADVISER



### Work performance and the menopause



**For some, going through the menopause can be uneventful but for many others it can be a very difficult experience**

It’s different for everyone but common symptoms can include poor concentration, hot flushes, memory loss, exhaustion, anxiety, depression and emotional outbursts.

RCN reps and employers need to be mindful that the menopause can sometimes be a contributory factor towards poor work performance.

Employers also need to be mindful of the Equality Act when dealing with poor performance issues. If employers fail to properly support their female employees during the menopause, they can risk facing claims for sex, disability and age discrimination.

You can read the RCN publication *The Menopause and Work: Guidance for RCN Representatives* at: [www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005467](http://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005467) or visit [www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/sickness](http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/sickness)

**For more information, speak in confidence to an RCN Direct adviser any time between 8.30am and 8.30pm, 365 days per year.**

**RCN DIRECT**  
[www.rcn.org.uk/direct](http://www.rcn.org.uk/direct)  
**0345 772 6100**

## View from the frontline



### Buzzing with joy

It was really special to me that RCN Congress took place in my home country of Northern Ireland for the first time this year. For me, the highlight was listening to Christie Watson. She articulated so many things that I myself had been thinking about during Congress.

As nursing staff, we're not good at selling ourselves but we save lives every single day. I agree with Christie that we need to shout loudly about excellent nursing care. I hope everyone who attended Congress will feel more empowered to do that.

There were some great fringe events too. The "Tea dance", hosted by the Older People's Nursing Network, had a real feel-good factor, as did the "Reps making a difference" event.

Of course, you don't have to become a rep to be an activist. Congress is a great place to start thinking about how you want to get involved. It's a golden opportunity to meet like-minded people and, importantly, it's a chance for every single member to have a say.

I was heartened that the emergency resolution to demand parity of pay for nurses in Northern Ireland was passed. It was wonderful to have support from RCN members from across the UK. I have so much to reflect on but right now, I'm absolutely buzzing with joy that the first Congress in Belfast was a success.

**Francis Lavery, RCN UK Learning Reps  
Committee Member for Northern Ireland**

## LEGAL UPDATE



### Equal pay

The Equal Pay Act 1970 was introduced in December 1975 and remained in force until the introduction of the Equality Act in October 2010.

We know that factors such as gender segregation in the labour market and caring responsibilities contribute to the gender pay gap. However, there is also another reason why equal pay for men and women remains elusive; sex discrimination.

The Equality Act 2010 attempts to address this by making it the law to include a sex equality clause in every employee's contract of employment.

If someone believes they have been treated unfairly in comparison to someone of the opposite sex in terms of their contract, they can pursue an equal pay claim in the Employment Tribunal.

In order to do this, the person must establish that they are employed on like work, work rated as equivalent or work of equal value to a comparator of the opposite sex and the inequality in pay must be because of their sex.

If there is a non-discriminatory explanation or a justified reason for the difference in pay then the claim won't succeed. Equal pay claims are notoriously long and complex.

If members believe they may have a potential equal pay claim they should contact RCN Direct on **0345 772 6100** for advice.

The time limit to pursue an equal pay claim is six months less one day from the date a member's employment terminates or there is a significant change in their contract, or from the date of any TUPE transfer.

**Joanne  
Galbraith-Marten**  
RCN Head of Legal  
(Employment)



## Zero tolerance – where we stand on sexual harassment



**The principles in our Respect Charter still stand but since we launched it at Congress 12 months ago, something has shifted within the public conversation about behaviour in the workplace**

Since October last year, the debate on what's acceptable behaviour has taken centre-stage.

There has been unprecedented media coverage on cases of sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement has seen women, and some men, from across the world unite, using social media to speak up against sexual harassment and assault.

The RCN has always had a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and has now strengthened that message with the below statement.

**In view of recent press coverage of cases of sexual harassment and intimidation, in the workplace and elsewhere, the RCN re-affirms its policy of zero tolerance of this (and any other) form of abuse of power.**

**We shall support those adversely affected. Inappropriate behaviour by staff or members will be investigated under the relevant RCN disciplinary procedures.**

Chris Cox, Director of Membership Relations, elaborates: "Our Respect Charter focuses on building positive relationships. A huge part of that is being aware of how your behaviour, at any time, can affect and influence others.

*"We want people to know that they can speak up"*

"We want people to know that they can speak up when someone else's behaviour is making them feel uncomfortable.

"We will challenge discrimination, harassment and bullying behaviours whenever possible and any inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated."

### Speaking up

If you're experiencing sexual harassment at work, the advice is to tell someone.

RCN Regional Officer Daniel Heppell says that's not always easy: "It's a personal thing and sexual harassment can often feel much more private than bullying or other forms of harassment.

"People sometimes feel ashamed or they think it might affect their career if they tell someone. But that isn't the case."

So, has anything changed in light of movements like #MeToo?

Daniel thinks it has: "People feel more empowered to speak out because they can see that things won't be brushed under the carpet. In the past, they may have felt like it wouldn't be taken seriously."

### You don't have to label something to get support

Nicola Lee, RCN National Officer, is really clear that the RCN's zero tolerance policy does not just apply to sexual harassment.

"There is no 'hierarchy of abuse'," she says. "Any unwanted or unwarranted behaviour is unacceptable – as is any abuse of power in any form."

"It is all important and although we want people to know how seriously we take sexual harassment, you don't have to label something in order to do something about it."

If a member tells you they're experiencing sexual harassment, advise them to speak to their manager, their local RCN steward or to call RCN Direct on **0345 772 6100**.

To read our full feature, which includes further advice, visit [www.rcn.org.uk/zerotolerance](http://www.rcn.org.uk/zerotolerance)

## Spice threatens safety

**The unprecedented use of the drug spice in UK prisons is a huge health and safety risk for nursing staff**

The RCN has been calling for the prison service to take urgent action to protect health care staff after RCN members from across the UK have reported that they often become severely unwell after inhaling fumes from the drug spice.

Spice is a psychoactive substance which has dangerous effects on the person smoking it and anyone who inhales the smoke second-hand.

Brian Morton, RCN National Officer, says: “This is a massive health and safety risk and we need clearer guidance from the prison service to protect health care staff.

“Current guidance suggests that nursing staff are expected to provide care for prisoners even if that means entering a cell which is filled with smoke. This is unacceptable.”

The problem is widespread and getting worse.

We spoke to J, who asked to remain anonymous. He provides primary care to over 500 prisoners. On a quiet day, J and his team are usually called out to at least one medical emergency that is a result of the prisoner smoking spice. Recently, they had to respond to over 50 in one week.

Nurses and health care assistants have reported feeling nauseous and light-headed, with some even falling unconscious. In at least one case, not at J’s prison, a nurse has been taken to A&E in an ambulance.

But it’s not just the physical effects that are the problem; if you inhale spice, technically you’re under the influence of drugs meaning you’re not allowed to drive and under the NMC code of conduct, you can’t prescribe medication.

J recounts: “Walking back after attending to a patient, I’ve suddenly felt dizzy, nauseous – it’s almost like the world has zoomed out. It’s really bizarre.

“I’ve sat in my car in the carpark for 50 minutes after work so I feel confident enough to drive. We’re all worried about driving in case it’s not safe or we get stopped and it shows in our system.”



*“We need clearer guidance from the prison service”*

If you’re an RCN safety rep and your organisation includes prison services, then it’s likely that staff in those services are experiencing similar problems.

You should encourage staff to familiarise themselves with their employer’s health and safety policies and to raise this issue with their employers so those policies can be reviewed.

As Brian points out, a review of the overarching policies put in place by the prison service is also needed and the RCN will be meeting with the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and NHS England to discuss this.

Until then, the advice to nursing staff remains clear: “Do not put yourself in danger”.

Brian says: “We know it’s difficult, especially in an emergency, but members need to protect their own safety and the safety of their colleagues first.”

To read the full story visit [www.rcn.org.uk/activate](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activate)

# NOTICEBOARD

## RCN elections



**If Congress has left you feeling excited about all the ways you can get involved with the RCN then why not think about standing in our upcoming elections?**

You could be the next RCN President, Deputy President, Chair of Congress, Vice-Chair of Congress, Student Member of Council, UK Reps Committee Member or Board Member.

At Congress we opened nominations for all of these roles and more.

Nominations for the prestigious roles of RCN President and Deputy President will close on 20 July 2018 and the term of office is for two years.

If you've been to Congress at least twice in the last four years then you're eligible to stand for the role of Chair of Congress or Vice-Chair of Congress. The term of office is for two years and nominations close on 6 July.

For more information on how to nominate yourself, and to find out which seats are up for election on our UK Reps Committees, Student Committee, Health Practitioner Committee and Country and Regional Boards, visit [www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved)

## Just go for it!

**Are you confident, willing to speak up and want to make a difference? Then according to Billy Nichols, you've got what it takes to be an RCN Reps Committee member**

Billy, who is the UK Safety Reps Committee Member for Wales, sees his role as the link between safety reps across Wales and the UK committee.

Billy said: "The best thing about this role is making sure the voice of my fellow safety reps is heard.

"The challenges are the same as with any other responsibility – time commitment and time management – but as long as you've spoken to your employer and they know what's expected of you, then it will work and it's more than worth it."

Want to give it a go but not quite convinced? Billy's advice is to "just go for it!"

"I was nervous to begin with," said Billy. "But the committee members were so welcoming and supportive. Everyone is encouraged to speak and the more experienced committee members are always on hand to give guidance.

"If you want to get involved, then it's a good indicator that you'll be great!"



## Subs remain at current level after AGM vote

**RCN members have authorised Council to set member subscription fees for a further five years, following a vote at the RCN Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

RCN Council has agreed that rates will remain frozen until at least January 2020 and said that after that any increases will be kept as low as possible.

The vote, which was passed by an overwhelming majority of those who took part, will allow the RCN to forward plan its work effectively.

Addressing her first AGM as Chair of RCN Council, Maria Trewern said: "The RCN strength is you, our members." She also singled out RCN activists for thanks. "Your commitment is second to none," she said.

## Tools of the trade



The CIPD has published a report on its first comprehensive survey of the UK workforce under its new Job Quality Index. Find the report and video highlights at <https://tinyurl.com/ukworkinglives>

When there's a problem at work, it should be tackled quickly but what's best - an informal approach or going through a formal channel for grievances? Acas explains the options available at <https://tinyurl.com/acasgrievancesatwork>

Public Health England has released a report on the planned phased return of Hepatitis B vaccine following manufacturing problems last year. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/HBVguidance>

Unionlearn's guide *Making Learning, and Meetings, Accessible to All* gives advice to union reps on how to support colleagues with a range of disabilities. You can view the guide at <https://tinyurl.com/accessiblelearning>