

Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists

We need action now.
#FundOurFuture

Support our new student funding campaign

Email your MP and help us get funding back into nursing higher education

The *Fund Our Future* campaign aims to get at least £1bn a year back into nursing higher education in England to help students struggling to make ends meet and stop the fall in nurse numbers.

Led by RCN student members, the campaign will raise awareness of the pressures faced by student nurses and force the Government to look again at how it funds student nurse education.

It seeks to influence plans for how extra funding for the NHS will be spent over the next 10 years. These plans will be published in December.

Members can support the campaign by emailing their MP and asking them to write to Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England, calling on them to put a minimum of £1bn a year back into nursing higher education.

The money would go some way to replacing the funding lost when the bursary for nursing degrees in England was removed, and provide incentives to encourage people to study nursing.

Since the bursary was scrapped, applications to study nursing are down by a third and there have been 1,800 fewer people accepted onto nursing degree courses.

Acting RCN Chief Executive Dame Donna Kinnair said: "The Government's policy to increase nursing student numbers by removing the bursary has failed.

"We now face falling student numbers at a time when nursing vacancies in England are expected to hit 48,000 in the next five years. It is time to rethink student education funding. Safe patient care depends on it."

Kelly Hitchcock, RCN Student Committee member, added: "Nursing is one of the toughest degree courses you can take. It was hard-going with the bursary. Now, with the added pressure of spiralling debt and a loan that often doesn't cover extra costs such as travel to placements, too many students are pushing themselves to their limits to qualify.

"This cannot continue. For the sake of current and future student nurses and safe patient care, please add your voice to ours."

Join the campaign at rcn.org.uk/fundourfuture

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NMC figures show workforce instability



Despite an overall rise in registrants, the number of EU nurses and midwives is falling

The NMC has released figures showing the number of nurses and midwives registered to work in the UK has increased by 3,880 in the past 12 months. At the end of September there were 693,618 people on the NMC register.

However the figures show the number of nurses and midwives from the UK joining the register for the first time in the 12 months to September is down by 2,034 on the previous year. The number of EU nurses and midwives registered to work in the UK has also fallen by 2,385 for the same period.

RCN Deputy Director of Nursing Stephanie Aiken said: "Despite the alarming number of vacancies for registered nurses, and increasing gaps in nursing rotas, the number of newly registered nurses is falling, not rising - with the impact of the withdrawal of funding for nursing students in England two years ago still to come. Our European colleagues are also continuing to leave the UK rather than face post-Brexit uncertainty."

Government clamps down on violence against NHS staff following RCN campaigning



Health Secretary announces new measures to better protect nursing staff from assaults at a summit hosted by the RCN

In a speech to RCN members, Matt Hancock revealed details of the first ever NHS violence reduction strategy to protect nursing staff from violence and aggression at work and ensure offenders are punished appropriately.

He outlined how the NHS will work with police and prosecutors to make sure victims are supported to give evidence and achieve swift prosecutions. He also pledged to provide better training for staff to deal with violent situations, including those involving patients who have dementia or mental health problems.

RCN reps have campaigned tirelessly to raise awareness of the threat of violence nursing staff face.

They recently helped secure changes to new legislation so that all those who provide NHS-funded care in England and Wales are covered by a law which sets out tougher sentences for people who assault nursing staff.

The RCN has published an interim report on violence and aggression in the NHS, which was launched at the event. This estimates the size and impact of the problem based on existing data and will be followed by a final report and guidance for RCN safety reps in the months to come. Download the interim report at rcn.org.uk/publications (code 007 301).

Pensions update

The RCN is working to influence changes to pension regulations

The RCN is represented on advisory boards for the NHS pension schemes in Scotland, England and Wales, and Northern Ireland. The boards are discussing the outcome of the recent scheme valuations and are required to make recommendations to the respective health departments on changes to the scheme from April 2019.

The health departments will then consult on changes to the pension regulations. Member benefits will improve with these changes, though these will be reviewed again in four years when the next valuation is undertaken.

Information will be circulated to reps and members as soon as decisions have been made by the health departments. The RCN will respond to any consultation on the regulations for each of the three UK NHS pension schemes.

Voting opens soon in RCN Council elections

Members will have until 11 December to return their postal ballot forms

Voting in the RCN Council elections opens on 21 November. Details of the candidates standing for election can be found at rcn.org.uk/council-2018

The elections are for one-year terms on Council from 1 January in the following constituencies: East Midlands, London, Northern, Northern Ireland, North West, Scotland, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber and health practitioners.

Richard Jones has been elected unopposed to represent Wales as no other candidates put themselves forward.

The elections opened after 12 of the 17 current Council members announced they would stand down part-way through their terms.

This was after an Extraordinary General Meeting at which the majority of RCN members who voted signalled no confidence in the leadership provided by the current Council.

RCN consults members in Northern Ireland on industrial action over pay

The RCN is asking members working in the Health and Social Care Service in Northern Ireland if they would be prepared to be balloted on industrial action over the continuing absence of a pay award for 2018-2019.

RCN Northern Ireland Board Chair Fiona Devlin said: "Nurses' pay in Northern Ireland has fallen significantly behind the other three UK countries. We have unprecedented pressures within the health and social care system that are made even worse by at least 1,800 vacant nursing posts.

"That is why we're asking members if they would be prepared to be balloted on taking industrial action in order to demand a fair pay award. Our future course of action in relation to pay will be determined by what our members tell us."

The RCN, along with the other health trade unions in Northern Ireland, has been

This was in response to the RCN's handling of the NHS pay deal for England in which members were given inaccurate information about how the deal would be implemented in the first year.

Visit rcn.org.uk/council-2018 to find out more.

Find out who has been elected as RCN President and Deputy President

Results of the RCN President and Deputy President elections will be announced on 16 November. Visit rcn.org.uk to find out who has been elected.

Eleven members stood for election to the prestigious roles with those chosen succeeding outgoing President Dr Cecilia Akrisie Anim CBE, who has served in the role since 2014, and Deputy President Professor Rod Thomson FRCN.

The winning candidates will hold office for two years, from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020.

Influencing internationally

RCN President Cecilia Akrisie Anim represented the RCN at the autumn meeting of the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) in Slovakia last month. At the meeting, the EFN decided to lobby on workforce issues and staffing for safe and effective care as part of its preparations for the next European elections. It was also agreed that the group would bring together evidence and arguments for investing in advanced practice in nursing, which is well established in some European countries, but not yet recognised in many others.

Moving on

Earlier this month, Josie Irwin, Associate Director of Employment Relations, left the RCN for a new role. Josie joined the College as a senior labour relations officer in July 1992 and worked with many activists in her 26 years with the RCN. Dame Donna Kinnair, Acting RCN Chief Executive, said: "It's been a pleasure working with Josie and I would like to thank her for her service to the College."

Board elections

Members in London, the North West, South East, West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales should have received an email from ERS on 31 October with online voting instructions. Voting for country and regional board elections closes on 27 November. If members can't find the email, they can contact elections@rcn.org.uk



discussing the pay award with the Department of Health. The department was asked to agree to an interim 3% pay award but unions have been told it cannot fund this.

The consultation closes on 26 November. Visit rcn.org.uk/northern-ireland-pay

Influencing politicians



Acting RCN Chief Executive Dame Donna Kinnair says writing an article for *The House* magazine, sent to every MP, was a chance to stress the need for safe nurse staffing legislation

I told them straight: “get ready, nurses are mobilising”. This was my opportunity to explain to politicians quite bluntly what we’re planning. They’ve given us laws covering everything from how to carry a plank along a pavement to handling salmon in suspicious circumstances. But patients and care residents are less fortunate.

Wales blazed a trail and became the first place in Europe to have staffing levels for health care fixed in law. Scotland is following suit. England and Northern Ireland need to catch up and make sure somebody other than the nurse on duty – such as the Minister and executive boards of providers – is accountable for patient safety.

The evidence is overwhelming. RCN members you work with will be telling you the same as they’ve told me: with rising vacancies, we’re struggling to provide the care people need.

For the politicians, I painted a vivid picture of understaffed shifts and how some aspects of care become rushed, untimely or left undone.

It won’t be solved by more tinkering at the edges. Politicians must understand the true demands of our ageing population and build from that a comprehensive workforce plan that links patient need to nurse recruitment – with a law that holds decision-makers to account.

Next year is a new chapter for the RCN and members in England in particular will get their chance to shape our safe nurse staffing campaign, engage every corner of the membership, and leave politicians in no doubt at the strength of our collective voice.

ASK AN ADVISER



Tackling bullying



What should members do?

RCN Direct still receives a high number of calls about workplace bullying each month and it’s regularly listed as one of the top 10 reasons members call.

Often members are very upset. This is sometimes because they’re calling after many incidents.

It’s so important that members keep a detailed diary of events and that we remind them to do so. A log of events helps to clarify exactly what happened and provides vital evidence if a member decides to make a complaint. Writing everything down can also be therapeutic.

The RCN’s guidance on bullying and harassment includes an example diary which members can use as a template to record events. It also includes information about the options they can consider and clear guidance on when to call RCN Direct.

Find out more at tinyurl.com/rcn-bullying-advice or turn to page 7.

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
0345 772 6100



View from the frontline



A new perspective

Becoming an RCN board member has opened my eyes to a whole new aspect of nursing. The role has made me feel more involved in the RCN and in the world of nursing more generally. I've had the opportunity to represent my country and get involved in so many different things. Some highlights include speaking at an RCN conference and being part of the subgroup that looked at the equality and inclusion element of the RCN's UK strategy. The role of a board member is never dull.

The support you receive from the RCN is fantastic. You know your views will be respected and valued. I've experienced personal and professional growth in this role, and I've enjoyed it, although it hasn't always been easy. The aftermath of the pay deal has been a difficult time but I've seen first-hand the commitment and thoughtful consideration my colleagues have given this, both as RCN representatives and as board members. One positive outcome has been the cry for better engagement with members.

There are a lot of elections taking place across the RCN at the moment. It's really important that we encourage members to vote in the country and regional board elections so they can have a say in who they want to represent them on a local level. Please help spread the word and if you're interested in becoming a board member, when the next opportunity comes up, go for it!

Val Douglas, RCN Scotland Board member
Visit tinyurl.com/rcn-board-elections and follow @RCNGovernance on Twitter

Bullying at work and the law

There is a long-standing misconception that you can pursue a free-standing legal claim as a result of bullying at work. Unfortunately, that isn't the case but there are legal options available.

There is no statutory definition of bullying. However, it can include offensive, intimidating and malicious behaviour, incivility in the workplace or behaviour that amounts to an abuse of power by undermining or humiliating someone.

If the bullying is related to a protected characteristic, such as age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marital status or religion and belief, then this might be unlawful discrimination and a claim could be pursued in the employment tribunal.

Employers are responsible for the health and safety of their employees. If an employer fails to deal with bullying that then results in negligence and/or a breach of contract, it could result in a personal injury claim. If an employer doesn't provide reasonable support for someone who is experiencing bullying, it may breach the implied term of mutual trust and confidence in the employment contract. If this happens, and the employee resigns as a result of the bullying, then they may be able to pursue a constructive unfair dismissal claim.

If members are experiencing bullying, they should keep a log of events, and inform their employer informally or start a formal grievance procedure. Strict time limits apply to the legal claims outlined above, so members should seek advice as soon as possible. Members can also access support from our free counselling service by calling RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100.

Joanne Galbraith-Marten
RCN Head of Legal
(Employment)



What reps need to know about flu vaccination

With some trusts taking a more punitive approach to flu vaccination, we unpick the RCN's recent advice to safety reps

A new briefing on flu vaccination for RCN reps advises that organisations should “adopt a jointly agreed strategy which takes an incentivised as opposed to a punitive approach and which protects staff from any detriment in the workplace.”

Kim Sunley, RCN National Officer, says: “Partnership working is absolutely crucial when it comes to flu vaccination. We know that a lot of safety reps are already really involved in the planning stages and throughout the vaccination period.”

However, despite effective collaboration in most organisations, the flu jab continues to cause controversy in some workplaces. One Kent trust recently suggested withholding sick pay for nursing staff who decline the vaccination. The proposal was dropped in the face of opposition from the RCN and other unions.

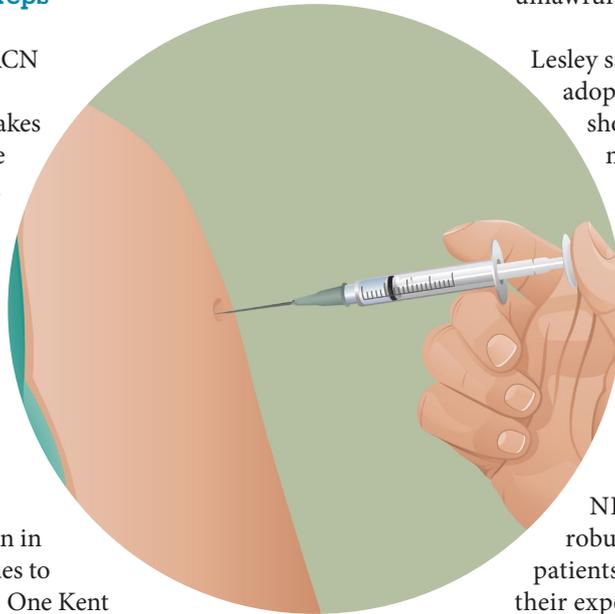
Lesley Pallett, Vice Chair of the RCN Safety Representatives Committee, says: “We need to be driving home a simple message about vaccination. It's important to have it and if you can have it, do.”

Offering incentives

Periodic suggestions that flu vaccination should be compulsory for NHS staff always generate debate. Kim says: “There are lots of examples of organisations using an incentivised approach, which the RCN supports. Some have entered vaccinated staff into draws for prizes or extra annual leave.”

But elsewhere the RCN has been made aware of instances of bullying behaviour by managers who are intent on ensuring all staff are vaccinated, which Kim says is never OK.

In a recent letter to chief executives, NHS England said staff who decline the vaccination should be treated with dignity, and the RCN asks reps to encourage members to report any instances of bullying behaviours and to respond to such reports on a case-by-case basis. The



“We need to be driving home a simple message about vaccination”

RCN's briefing makes it clear that withholding sick pay from unvaccinated staff would be unlawful and should be challenged.

Lesley says that where managers do try to adopt heavy-handed approaches, reps should explain that encouragement is more effective than enforcement.

“If you don't have the flu jab, you can still practise,” says Lesley.

“We also need to recognise that some people might not be able to have the vaccine if, for example, they're allergic to one of the constituent components.”

Protecting patients

NHS England advises that “more robust steps” should be taken to protect patients in higher-risk areas by limiting their exposure to unvaccinated staff. It says managers should consider redeploying unvaccinated staff to lower-risk areas, with those who have been vaccinated moving to fill the gaps. Such high risk settings include haematology, oncology, bone marrow transplant and neonatal intensive care.

Kim says: “We don't oppose such redeployment but it should be without detriment to the staff member's employment rights and working arrangements. It must be a temporary move with the length specified, and redeployed staff assured that they have the right to return to their substantive post at the end of the defined period.”

The RCN's briefing for reps highlights that it's also reasonable for a staff member to refuse to move to an area where they could put their patients – and their registration – at risk.

Read the full article at rcn.org.uk/activate



The advice *Briefing for RCN Workplace Representatives on Flu Vaccinations 2018/19* has been emailed to reps and is available online on the RCN reps hub. Visit the RCN's *Beat the Flu* campaign webpages for resources to encourage nursing staff to have the vaccine including a downloadable “mythbuster” poster: rcn.org.uk/beat-the-flu

What can we do about workplace bullying?

Research shows that one in four NHS staff have experienced bullying, harassment or abuse at work. We speak to RCN steward Maggy Heaton about what can be done to change the culture of workplace bullying

Directors can be dismissed if they fail to tackle bullying they're aware of but getting people to speak up in the first place can be the biggest challenge.

"Members tend to put up with bullying for a long time before speaking to their union," says Maggy. "They don't think there'll be any consequence for the bully or they think they'll be seen as a troublemaker. We find that other members of staff who have witnessed bullying won't speak up either. Often there's a known culture of bullying in a particular area which makes it difficult."

Partnership working

Sometimes the way employers handle cases doesn't help, says Maggy. "Over the past few years, I've had multiple members of staff from the same area come to me about bullying. We've raised claims but the results keep coming back as no case to answer. The best I could do was to get the member moved to a new department which doesn't stop the bullying culture.

"I realised that I needed to try and tackle the problem differently so with the members' consent, I spoke to the trust's freedom to speak up guardian. They're able to go in, watch what's going on, write a report and make recommendations. Depending on what they find, it could help our case and hopefully it'll lead to wider improvements."

This type of partnership working is key to tackling a bullying culture says Maggy, who has teamed up with her trust's HR team on a number of initiatives. Together they've produced joint training for managers and improved the way exit interviews are carried out so people can speak more freely about concerns.

If someone is being bullied, it's important they keep a log of what happens. Maggy says: "I give people a printed copy of the RCN's example bullying diary. It asks them to write down their feelings while everything is fresh in their mind and we use it as the case progresses."



"Think how you can work with employers to create an environment where people can speak up"

The RCN's guidance also advises people to consider whether they would be able to confront the person, which in some cases can help. "However, if a person is being badly bullied then their confidence will be low so it can be difficult for them to take that bold step," says Maggy. "As a steward, I can offer to support them at a meeting with a senior manager."

Seek help straight away

Maggy's most important bit of advice is to encourage members to ask for help as soon as possible: "Standing up to bullying really early will help it to stop. As for changing bullying culture, that's where partnership working comes in. Think about how you can work with employers and other union reps to help create an environment where people can speak up."

Read the full article at rcn.org.uk/activate

Resources to support you

Download bullying and harassment guidance for reps from rcn.org.uk/publications (code 004969) or visit tinyurl.com/rcn-bullying-advice

You can also get useful advice on creating a workplace culture where bullying is the exception rather than the norm by looking at the dignity at work section of rcn.org.uk/healthy-workplace/healthy-workplaces

The RCN's resource *Working with Care* helps nursing staff examine their interactions with colleagues. Visit rcn.org.uk/publications (code 004972). If you're using this tool in your workplace, the RCN Employment Relations Department would like to hear from you. Contact kim.sunley@rcn.org.uk

NOTICEBOARD

Thanks to donors



Do you know someone who's made a large donation to the RCN Foundation?

The RCN Foundation is a charity that supports and strengthens nursing. It is developing an online publication to celebrate the contribution its donors have made to nursing education over the years.

To make sure the publication captures the essence and personality of those featured, the charity is asking for photos, stories or anecdotes about the following prominent donors:

David Thomas, Peter Holgate, Thomas Page, Muriel Fleet, Muriel Stott, Trevor Clay, Kathleen Raven, Lady Cowdray, Halifax Scholarship Fund, Elizabeth Leedham, Gertrude Cowlin, The Kelsey Bequest, Dame Sidney Browne, Monica Baly, Rae Bequest, Marcia Mackie, Alexander Mair, Dame Betty Kershaw, Daphne Health, Winifred Raphael and Mona Grey OBE.

To share something, or for more information, contact rcnfoundation@rcn.org.uk.

Find out more about the RCN Foundation at www.rcnfoundation.org.uk

New RCN guidance to support staff with dementia

The RCN Older People's Forum has helped develop new guidance for employers, reps and nursing staff

Dementia in the Workplace aims to tackle the stigma surrounding dementia and enable nursing staff with a diagnosis to work as fully as they are able to and for as long as they want to.

The guidance is a direct result of a resolution put forward by the RCN Older People's Forum at Congress in 2017. It asked members to support the development of a strategy to help members with dementia continue nursing.

RCN National Officer Nicola Lee says: "We should be embracing nursing staff with dementia and making it possible for them to continue delivering excellent patient care. This guidance will be really useful to reps and help

Members voted to develop this work at Congress 2017



them work with employers to support nursing staff with dementia."

Download the guidance or order a hard copy at rcn.org.uk/publications (code 007088)

Antibiotic awareness

You can help reduce inappropriate antibiotic use

Antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by bacteria but overuse in recent years means they've become less effective. European Antibiotic Awareness Day on 18 November highlights the global threat of antimicrobial resistance and promotes the need to protect these special medicines by avoiding unnecessary or inappropriate use.

"As nursing staff we have an important role to play in educating people about the dangers of antimicrobial resistance," says Rose Gallagher, RCN Professional Lead for Infection Prevention and Control. "This can't be managed by hospitals and health care staff alone. Everyone has a part to play so we must raise awareness." If you're doing something for Antibiotic Awareness Day in your workplace, share it with us on social media on 18 November by tagging @RCN in your tweets.

Tools of the trade



The Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which comes into force in 2020, will provide the right to two weeks' leave for employees who have lost a child under the age of 18 or when a child is stillborn (from 24 weeks of pregnancy). Visit tinyurl.com/leave-for-bereaved-parents

The TUC has updated its guide *Mental Health and the Workplace*. Download the guidance at tinyurl.com/TUC-MH-workplace

NICE has published guidelines on how to increase uptake of the free flu vaccine among eligible groups including health care staff. Take a look at tinyurl.com/NICE-flu

Find out how Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council ran an award-winning flu campaign for staff and residents, increasing uptake and raising awareness. Visit tinyurl.com/Stockport-flu-fighter