

ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT TO COUNCIL

JULY 2016



Royal College of Nursing

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the activity of the Communications Department between April and July 2016. Highlights include our member and wider public engagement activities for Nurses Day, including a film seen by more than 1 million people, and unprecedented social media reach during Congress week. We have concentrated on highlighting key issues including concerns around student nurse funding, proposals to remove the nursing policy unit from the Department of Health, the value of nursing and the nursing team and the importance of taking part in the EU Referendum.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The aim of the Communications Department is to enable the RCN to use all its communications channels to engage effectively with our different stakeholder audiences in order to help deliver our mission successfully. We seek:

- to enable the RCN to be the voice of nursing and speak effectively for our members
- to strengthen the RCN's voice and influence and use that to shape health policies on behalf of our members and their patients
- to campaign for improvements for our members and the whole of nursing
- to promote excellent nursing practice
- to promote the value of RCN membership by engaging effectively with potential and current members

We aim to engage our members and use their voices to strengthen our messages.

By ensuring that the right people hear and are influenced by what we say, our goal is to help make nursing practice the best it can be, and to empower nurses to deliver high quality patient care.

CONGRESS

Congress is our biggest opportunity for engaging our members and for highlighting our key messages in the year. We used our communications channels to promote engagement with the event, both for those attending, and those following it online.

As well as bringing thousands of members together, Congress 2016 extended further into the virtual world, reaching over 10.5 million people. We saw a 44% increase in Twitter contributors (from 4,064 in 2015 to 5,865 this year) and there were more than 45,000 tweets on the #RCN16 hashtag. Whilst we reached over 9.5 million people via Twitter, we fell slightly below our overall social media KPI: this may be because we were being over-ambitious with our target given that Twitter usage overall is flat or in decline.

Commentary from social media added to the discussions, and it was encouraging to see members taking to Twitter for the first time, spurred on by the Twitter walls and the daily updates. Some of the biggest Twitter surges were around our high-profile keynote speakers and the student bursary debate.

We secured good broadcast and print media coverage for all our pre-planned stories, and for debates and decisions during the week, though the timing, just before the referendum, meant that coverage was not as good as it has been in previous years.

Our member survey about the state of the NHS received widespread coverage across the UK, including *BBC Breakfast*, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, whilst RCN members' views on emergency care were reported by a wide range of broadcast and print media including *The Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, BBC News and ITV News.

The new delegate pack for all attendees were well received. This was a cutting edge piece of work by the publications team, involving over 70,000 personalised pages of content, collated and distributed to delegates. We are already looking in to the possibilities this opens up for our year-round membership mailings, in particular in the RCN member handbook.

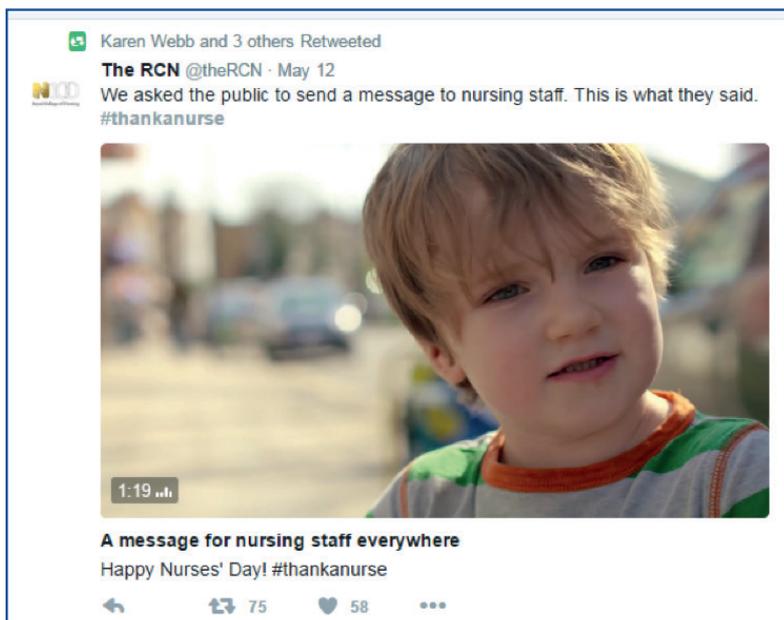


AGM

Following on from critical comments from members at last year's AGM, the team produced a very different, more engaging annual report this year. We're currently working with the Governance and Finance teams to evaluate the work, particularly because of the compressed time period for completing it between the end of the 2016 financial year and the 2017 AGM.

NURSES' DAY

Our Nurses' Day celebrations in May engaged millions of people, including members, patients and the public. Our social media campaign, #thankanurse, reached more than 2 million people with positive messages about nursing, and our Nurses' Day film featuring messages of thanks from the public has been watched more than 1 million times. We held a centenary-themed party in Cavendish Square, which helped members of the public learn more about nursing history, and encouraged them to write handwritten thank you messages to nurses. Hundreds of people did this, and their messages were shared on social media and displayed at Congress. We were able to fulfil a record number of requests for materials, but as usual, demand exceeded supply. We will be reviewing our communications and engagement goals for nurses' day next year to ensure that we maximise the opportunities, and have already started discussions with colleagues in the regional and country offices.



STUDENT BURSARIES



The RCN continued to support students and the wider membership to protest against changes to student nurse funding in England. A mass lobby of Parliament in May saw members meet their MPs to discuss the issue, and hundreds marched to the Department of Health in June to protest and hear from President Cecilia Anim. We have surveyed members to inform our consultation response, receiving an impressive 17,000 responses. We submitted our evidence to the government at the end of June.

The issue has received good media coverage: our survey of members was featured by BBC News, the *i* newspaper and the *London Evening Standard*, while our open letter to Prime Minister David Cameron – signed by more than 20 health organisations – was covered by BBC *Breakfast* and *The Observer*.

EU REFERENDUM

The Campaigns and Digital team worked with the International and Parliamentary teams to ensure that members were engaged in and informed about the EU Referendum, and nursing issues. We promoted the RCN's briefing on the issues and encouraged participation.

We emailed all members immediately after the result, to reassure them, and to express our support for EU nurses working in the UK in particular. We'll be continuing to keep members informed about our response to the developments.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CLOSURE OF NURSING POLICY UNIT

We have used *Nursing Standard* and *Nursing Times* to highlight our concerns about the closure of the DH nursing policy unit, and social media to promote a petition calling for a halt to the plans. The Congress emergency resolution condemning the decision helped raise the profile of the issue, and the Parliamentary team followed it with a letter to the health secretary.

PAY CAMPAIGN

Our work to inform and engage members about the issue of pay continues. Ongoing promotion has resulted in hundreds of orders for campaign materials, and active members are working to encourage others to take small campaign actions. We are also working to develop and evolve the campaign: we held a fringe event at Congress, where we gathered valuable campaign ideas, and are also undertaking telephone research with members.

UK-WIDE COMMUNICATIONS WORK

Northern Ireland Assembly election campaign

The pay and political campaign delivered by the RCN in Northern Ireland during the autumn and winter of 2015-2016 culminated in the delivery of a member-led and member-engaged campaign to highlight the RCN's priorities for the Northern Ireland Assembly election on 5 May 2016. The RCN election manifesto was actively promoted amongst RCN members and with candidates via social media and by RCN members at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in Dublin on 22 and 23 April.

RCN centenary events in Northern Ireland

Pauline Casey received the RCN Northern Ireland Nurse of the Year Award for 2016 at a gala ceremony held at Hillsborough Castle on the evening of Nurses' Day, Thursday 12 May 2016. The awards ceremony, which formed part of the RCN's centenary celebrations in Northern Ireland, was attended by a number of Northern Ireland health service leaders and politicians. It generated substantial coverage in the Northern Ireland and professional media, including social media.

A ceremony and gala event to confer the Freedom of the City of Belfast upon nurses who have worked or trained within Belfast was hosted by Lord Mayor Councillor Arder Carson and Belfast City Council on Wednesday 25 May. RCN President Cecilia Anim attended the conferment ceremony at Belfast City Hall. Again, the event generated significant coverage in the Northern Ireland and professional media, including social media.

RCN Wales' Time to Care 2016 campaign

The goals of the Time To Care 2016 election campaign were to politically influence on behalf of nursing and encourage the participation of members. The specific policy calls were based on a membership survey. The campaign achieved cross-party support on nurse staffing levels and the adoption of a number of other RCN priorities.

Following the passing of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act, RCN Wales held a successful and well attended event at Ty Maeth to discuss extending the act with nurses specialising in community nursing and mental health nursing. This resulted in pledges from the major parties that they would consider this.

Lobbying of Assembly Members on the issue of student funding resulted in commitments from all parties to keeping the nursing bursary, which represents a significant campaigning success for RCN Wales.

RCN London Housing Survey

This aimed to identify levers to help members living in high-cost areas; promote member engagement with regional elections and promote the RCN & nursing with Mayor of London and London Assembly

The four leading mayoral candidates replied to our call for action ahead of the election. There was good feedback from members and strong engagement with the website, particularly on Twitter and through the national facebook page.

The report was widely covered in local and national media.

Immediately following the election, NHS Employers wrote to the new Mayor Sadiq Khan referencing the RCN work and requesting a meeting to discuss help for low-paid health workers.

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