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# RCN LONDON SAFE STAFFING REPORT 2014



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Published by the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN

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# Introduction

During 2014 the number of budgeted NHS nursing posts has risen across the country. After several years of cutbacks as employers looked to balance the books, the Francis Report has driven a renewed focus on NHS staffing levels aimed at delivering good quality, safe patient care.

London has benefited from its share of this boost to nursing numbers. London NHS trusts have increased nursing establishments in 2014 by four per cent, or around 2,500 posts. Every London trust but four increased their budgeted number of nurses this year. Around a thousand more nurses are now working in London's NHS compared to a year ago.

However, within the headline rises of posts, we have seen continued cutbacks at senior levels. Our research shows four in five of the new jobs created have been at Band 5, while at Band 8a and above, posts have been cut by a further two per cent.

And despite the new jobs available, London still suffers from a critical shortage of nurses. In 2014, vacancy rates for London nursing are running at fourteen per cent, up from eleven per cent last year. There are around 8,000 budgeted nursing posts in London sitting unfilled. A breakdown by employer is available on page 6 of this report.

We are hearing of a particular strain on mental health services. This report contains on pages 4-5 the results of a survey of our London members who work in mental health. The results do not make for easy reading. The shortage of available, suitably qualified nurses is starting to have knock on effects for the ability of London's NHS to achieve the staffing levels which nursing colleagues desire and to keep providing safe care at the standard patients expect.

Employers are increasingly reliant on temporary and agency staff to fill the gaps and many are also looking overseas to recruit in the short-term. The result is we have witnessed increasing numbers of nurses from across the world come to work in London's NHS and, while we welcome the contribution these colleagues will make, it is not a sustainable long-term solution. Workforce plans need to address the previous deficits which have led to too few home grown nursing staff being trained.

There are three steps to be taken which we believe would help. We are calling for a more strategic approach to long-term workforce planning to ease staffing challenges right across the region. We want the pay freeze ended as soon as possible. And we are looking to encourage better pastoral care for nursing staff who are living and working in the UK for the first time so that they are able to settle here in London.

London remains an incredible place to live and to work. RCN London will continue to strive, alongside employers and NHS colleagues, to make the case for nursing staff from the UK or from abroad to come to our city to build a career. We will also keep doing all we can to encourage young people to consider what is still, despite all the challenges, the most fantastic and rewarding of professions.

**Bernell Bussue**  
**Regional Director, RCN London**  
**December 2014**

# London's recruitment crisis continues

With a renewed focus on safe staffing levels after the Francis report most London trusts have increased their budgeted nursing establishments this year. The link between staffing numbers, skill mix and patient safety is now inescapable.

In total, London budgeted nursing establishments have increased this year by four per cent, or around 2,500 posts. In practice the number of nurses working in London has increased by around 1000. However this means that only around forty per cent of the newly created posts this year have actually been filled.

A major challenge for London's NHS is the critical shortage of registered nursing staff. Increasing demand from patients, combined with an ongoing pay freeze and the rising cost of living, means employers are finding it harder and harder to identify suitable candidates for vacant posts.

In 2014, across London as a whole the NHS nursing vacancy rate is now at fourteen per cent, up from eleven per cent in 2013. In total around

8,000 London NHS nursing posts are now unfilled. The rate varies around the region, and seven individual employers reported vacancy rates of nineteen per cent or more, peaking at twenty three per cent.

Only four London trusts have cut posts in 2014, but in reality nine now employ fewer nurses than a year ago. It seems employers are simply unable to find available staff. We have heard of trusts advertising jobs and not finding a single candidate who can attend an interview. More and more are looking overseas to recruit and a recent BBC survey found spending on temporary and agency staff of around £1m a month across some London trusts.

Worryingly, within the headline figures we also found a continued hollowing out of senior posts. Four in five new posts are at Band 5. At Band 8a and above, posts have continued to be cut by two per cent. With such high turnover of staff and such pressure on services, the loss of leadership positions remains a worry for London nursing.

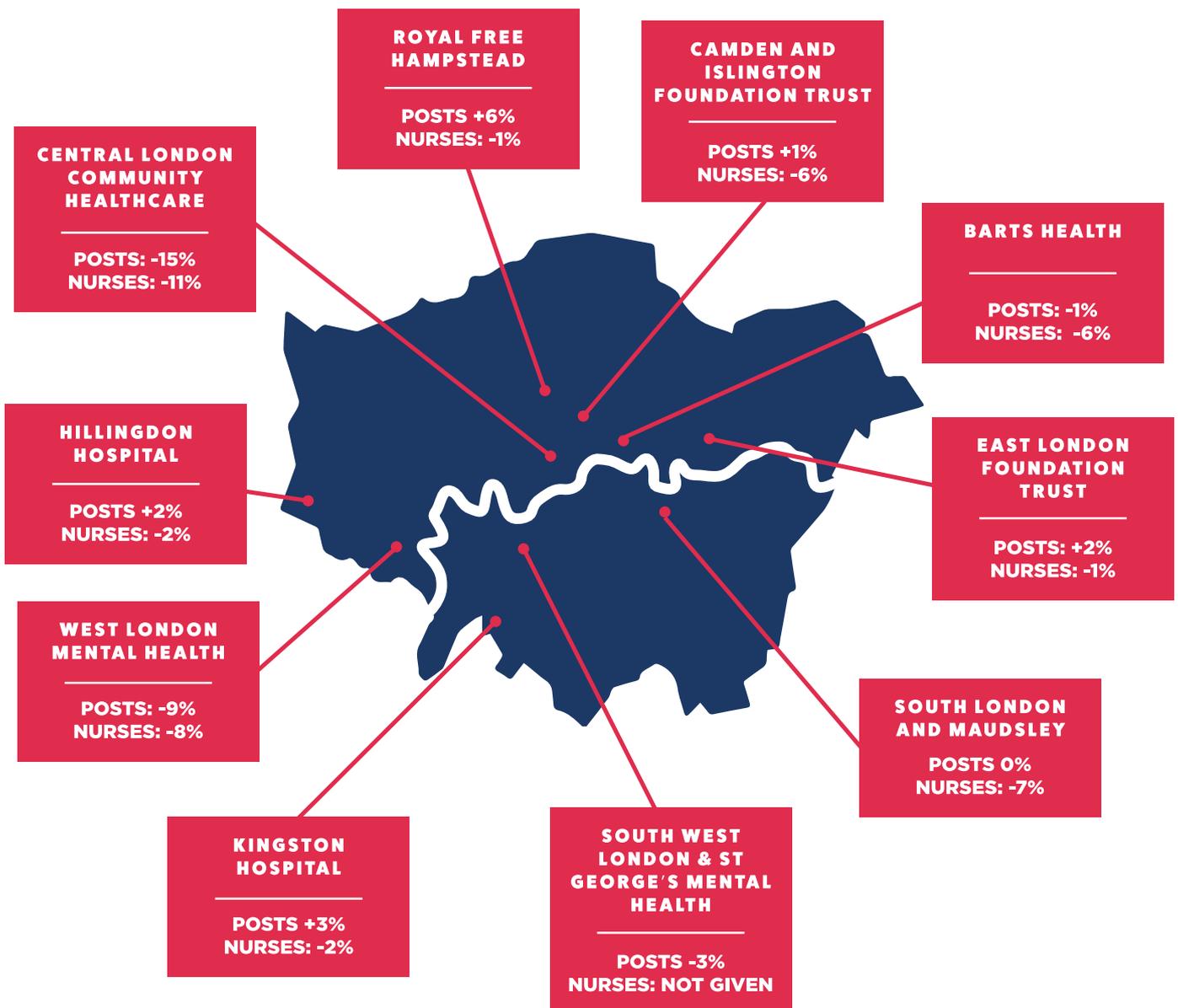
Band	Total London nursing vacancies July 14	Total London vacancy rate July 14
5	4423	17%
6	2613	13%
7	935	9%
8a and above	218	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8189</b>	<b>14%</b>

Band	Change in establishment since April 2013	Estimated change in number of posts since April 2013	Change in total nurses employed since April 2013	Estimated change in total nurses employed since April 2013
5	8%	1904	3%	677
6	2%	437	0%	47
7	2%	199	3%	246
8a and above	-2%	-65	0%	-9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2463</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>956</b>

Source: Freedom of Information request carried out by RCN London, August 2014. All posts whole time equivalent (WTE).

**THE GOVERNMENT SAYS THE NUMBER OF NURSING POSTS IS GOING UP, BUT IN LONDON THE INCREASE IS UNDERMINED BY A SHORTAGE OF REGISTERED NURSES.**

**ONLY 4 LONDON NHS TRUSTS HAVE CUT POSTS IN 2014 BUT IN REALITY 9 NOW EMPLOY FEWER NURSES THAN A YEAR AGO.**



**SOURCE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST BY RCN LONDON, AUGUST 2014. FIGURES REPRESENT CHANGE TO REGISTERED NURSING ESTABLISHMENT (WTE) AND CHANGE TO TOTAL REGISTERED NURSES EMPLOYED (WTE)**

# A strain on mental health services

Throughout September 2014, we surveyed RCN London members working for NHS mental health providers about staffing levels at their work. The results show clear evidence of the growing strain on mental health nurses in London.

New commissioning arrangements mean NHS providers are being undercut by the private sector. Services are increasingly fragmented. The squeeze from all sides on funding for mental health services is starting to cut into the quality of care which patients receive.

The RCN's national *Frontline First* report *Turning back the clock*, published in November, showed that England has lost more than 3,000 mental health nurses and 1,500 mental health beds since 2010. Meanwhile cuts to specialist services have driven up hospital admissions over the same period.

The *Frontline First* report calls for the right resources and funding, and commitment from all levels of Government, to ensure that this important arm of nursing is protected and can continue to care for and support people when they are at their most vulnerable.

In our London survey, RCN members said they were increasingly having to work unpaid overtime, but many still said they were caring for unsafe numbers of patients on at least a weekly basis.

Sixty nine per cent of members said their ward or unit had too few qualified nursing staff, while seventy per cent said that staffing levels were negatively impacting patient care. Sixty per cent said they were asked to care for more patients than is safe at least once a week.

One Band 6 mental health nurse working in south London told us: "I feel the job is becoming unsafe both for staff and patients. The option of actually offering any positive treatment is becoming less and less, and the job is mainly firefighting and crisis management. A lot of the time the only thing that gets jobs finished is the good will of staff. To be honest this is starting to become thin on the ground."

And RCN members said they increasingly had to work longer hours to help plug the gaps. Forty seven per cent said they had to skip breaks on a daily basis, sixty two per cent said they worked unplanned overtime at least once a week, and twenty five per cent said they were working unplanned overtime every single day.

One band 5 nurse said: "I have never taken a break during a day shift for the past year, because there just aren't enough experienced staff on shift to manage the safety of the ward."

Staffing shortages in London mean that mental health trusts are increasingly dependent on agency staff to get by. Fifty three per cent of those who took part in the survey said their shift relied on bank and agency staff every day.

One Band 5 nurse in south London said: "Every day on my unit you see new Band 5 bank staff and new Band 2 bank staff. And this is dangerously affecting patients care as patients are daily faced with new staff with a different approach. This measure is putting serious stress on staff themselves. As a permanent member of staff the entire workload for that shift is solely on your head."

You can read the full results of the survey on the RCN London website at [www.rcn.org.uk/londonMH2014](http://www.rcn.org.uk/londonMH2014)

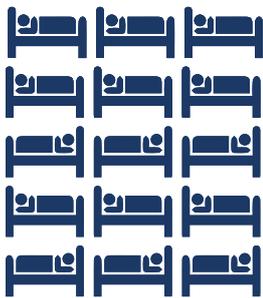
You can read more of the details of cuts to services nationally at <http://frontlinefirst.rcn.org.uk>

# PATIENT SAFETY

RCN MEMBERS IN LONDON SAY A SHORTAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH NURSES IS THREATENING PATIENT CARE

**69%**

SAID THEIR WARD OR UNIT HAD TOO FEW QUALIFIED NURSING STAFF



60% SAID THEY WERE ASKED TO CARE FOR MORE PATIENTS THAN IS SAFE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK



PATIENT SAFETY IS CONSIDERED A PRIORITY. THE PROBLEM IS ACCESSING SUITABLE STAFF TO WORK IN THE DEPARTMENT

BAND 8 NURSE, EAST LONDON

**70%**

SAID THAT STAFFING LEVELS WERE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING PATIENT CARE

**53%**

SAID THEIR UNIT RELIED ON BANK AND AGENCY STAFF EVERY DAY

**26%**

SAID THEY WERE ASKED TO CARE FOR MORE PATIENTS THAN IS SAFE EVERY SINGLE DAY



# SQUEEZED HOURS

RCN MEMBERS IN LONDON SAY THEY INCREASINGLY HAVE TO WORK LONGER HOURS TO HELP PLUG THE GAPS IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



SAID THEY HAD TO SKIP BREAKS ON A DAILY BASIS

**62%**

SAID THEY WORKED UNPLANNED OVERTIME AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK



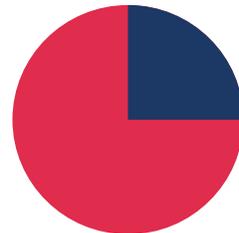
**38%**

HAD MORE DIFFICULTY GETTING TIME OFF THAN IN PREVIOUS YEARS



THE WORKLOAD IS RELENTLESS. I OFTEN HAVE TO COME IN TO WORK EARLY AND STAY ON LATE JUST TO KEEP ON TOP OF MY WORK. THIS MEANS I FIND IT HARD TO BOOK IN FOR TRAINING AND EVEN THEN A LOT OF TRAINING IS BOOKED UP WELL IN ADVANCE

BAND 6 NURSE, SOUTH LONDON



25% SAID THEY WERE WORKING UNPLANNED OVERTIME EVERY SINGLE DAY



**28%**

SAID THEIR UNIT NEVER HAD AS MANY STAFF AS PLANNED

## Freedom of Information results for 2014 nursing establishments and vacancies at London NHS trusts

	Total qualified nursing vacancies, July 2014 (WTE)	Nursing vacancy rate July 14	Change to qualified nursing establishment since April 2013 (WTE)	Change in total qualified nurses employed since April 2013 (WTE)
<b>LONDON TOTAL</b>	<b>8189</b>	<b>14%</b>		
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust	273	13%	4%	3%
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	116	8%	Not given	Not given
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust	148	16%	6%	7%
Barts Health NHS Trust	721	15%	-1%	-6%
Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust	96	21%	1%	-6%
Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust	94	10%	-15%	-11%
Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust	65	3%	Not given	Not given
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	163	15%	3%	1%
Croydon Health Services NHS Trust	259	20%	14%	12%
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	257	19%	0%	1%
East London NHS Foundation Trust	102	9%	2%	-1%
Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust	285	19%	10%	1%
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation	41	3%	5%	7%
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust	655	14%	5%	6%
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	87	11%	2%	-2%
Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	139	11%	4%	5%
Hounslow and Richmond Community Health NHS Trust	79	23%	5%	2%
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust	423	12%	2%	2%
King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	747	17%	57%	38%
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	115	16%	3%	-2%
Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Trust	377	16%	92%	85%
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	65	15%	8%	6%

	Total qualified nursing vacancies, July 2014 (WTE)	Nursing vacancy rate July 14	Change to qualified nursing establishment since April 2013 (WTE)	Change in total qualified nurses employed since April 2013 (WTE)
North East London NHS Foundation Trust	Not given	Not given	Not given	Not given
North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	127	14%	35%	32%
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	374	18%	12%	11%
Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust	168	14%	9%	4%
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Foundation Trust	264	20%	7%	1%
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	198	12%	6%	-1%
Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust	124	11%	0%	1%
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	67	15%	11%	3%
South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust	305	19%	0%	-7%
South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust	127	19%	-3%	Not given
St George's Healthcare NHS Trust	357	13%	8%	3%
University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	395	14%	9%	7%
West London Mental Health NHS Trust	134	12%	-9%	-8%
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	69	12%	3%	1%
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	178	13%	4%	1%

**Notes:**

Data collected by a Freedom of Information request carried out by RCN London in August 2014. All posts given as whole time equivalent (WTE). Vacancy figures are rounded so may not match total.

North East London NHS Foundation Trust is reorganising its nursing structure and said it was unable to give current figures.

The establishment and vacancies at Kings and Lewisham are both significantly affected by taking on services from the former South London Healthcare NHS Trust. No 2013 South London Healthcare data was available.

Barnet and Chase Farm and Royal Free have now merged. No 2013 figures were available for BCF. Royal Free figures are for Royal Free only.

Central and North West London did not give comparable 2013 figures.

Data for these trusts has therefore been omitted from the year on year comparison.

## What next?

The Royal College of Nursing in London works closely with employers from across the region, as well as with NHS England (London), the Trust Development Agency and Health Education England, to help enable nursing staff to deliver good quality patient care. RCN London champions safe staffing levels and is committed to supporting members where they have concerns that poor nurse to patient ratios or skill mix are a threat to patient safety.

For RCN members who are concerned about the safety of staffing levels at work, the first point of contact is RCN Direct who will be able to advise on the best support available to you. RCN Direct can be contacted on 0345 772 6100.

In London more generally, as patient demand and the cost of living both continue to go up, all employers are dealing with a growing shortage of nursing staff. There are three steps which RCN London believes must be taken to address this challenge.

- 1) We need a much more strategic approach to long term workforce planning. Too often decisions have been taken in a piecemeal fashion and training numbers have been set without consideration for the number of students who train in London then leave to work elsewhere. There has now been a welcome boost to training places but it will take several years for these recruits to come through the system. The bottleneck caused by recent cutbacks cannot be allowed to happen again in future years.
- 2) The Government must end the ongoing pay freeze which has been imposed on NHS staff for most of the past four years. Nationally, nurses' pay has lagged eight per cent below inflation since 2010. This gap is even worse in London where the cost of living, particularly housing, has continued to spiral upwards. The Government needs to restore nursing as an attractive, affordable career option for Londoners to pursue.
- 3) In the short term we need better pastoral care for nurses coming to work here from overseas. New staff often face cultural challenges in working practices as well as the upheaval of living in a different country. Much more must be done, by employers and by the system as a whole, to enable new recruits to settle and build long-term careers here within London's health service.

**LONDON HOSPITAL TRUSTS HAVE INCREASED STAFFING LEVELS IN 2014...**



**...BUT A SHORTAGE OF NURSES MEANS MANY EMPLOYERS SIMPLY CAN'T FILL VACANT POSTS.**



**14%**

**IN 2014, THE LONDON NHS NURSING VACANCY RATE IS 14%. THAT'S UP FROM 11% IN 2013.**

**8189**

**IN TOTAL THERE ARE NOW 8189 LONDON NHS NURSING POSTS UNFILLED**

**SEVEN LONDON NHS EMPLOYERS HAVE VACANCY RATES OF 19% OR MORE, PEAKING AT 23%**



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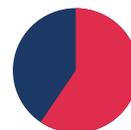
**2500**

**LONDON BUDGETED NURSING ESTABLISHMENTS HAVE INCREASED IN 2014 BY 4%, OR AROUND 2500 POSTS**

**HOWEVER, IN PRACTICE THE NUMBER OF NURSES WORKING IN LONDON HAS ONLY INCREASED BY AROUND 1000.**

**1000**

**40%**



**ONLY 40% OF THE NEWLY CREATED POSTS THIS YEAR HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN FILLED**

**80% OF THE NEW JOBS CREATED ARE AT BAND 5**



**SENIOR POSTS AT BAND 8A+ WERE CUT BY 2%**

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

December 2014

Published by the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN

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

Publication code: 004 775



**Royal College of Nursing**  
London