



Keeping RCN members up to date with what's going on across the Northern Region

Calling all school nurses

School nursing is under unprecedented pressure in the North East and Cumbria. A combination of budget cuts and increased demand on services means that school nurses are under a lot of strain.



If you are a school nurse and have any personal concerns about your own position, please contact us immediately on 0345 772 6100.

But regardless of your personal circumstances, we urgently need more data on school nursing in the region. Have service delivery changes affected your ability to do your job? Have staffing levels changed locally? Then please let us know. We are asking all school nurses to take part in our short [online national survey](#).

All responses will be treated in strictest confidence, and will help shape our response to a part of the profession that is under currently threat.

Thank you in advance for your help and contributions. **The deadline for responses is 31 March 2016.**

You can access the survey using this link: <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/schoolnursing2016/>

Please share the link with anyone you think would be able to give us a useful insight into the situation regarding the school nursing service in your area.

An advertisement for insurance services for RCN members. It features a green car, a house, and the RCN logo. Text includes: 'CAR INSURANCE FOR RCN MEMBERS 0800 756 8131 www.rcn.org.uk/insurance', 'HOME INSURANCE FOR RCN MEMBERS 0800 756 8131', 'LIVERPOOL VICTORIA', and 'Royal College of Nursing'. A small vertical text 'FS21547082' is on the right.

CAR INSURANCE FOR RCN MEMBERS
0800 756 8131 www.rcn.org.uk/insurance
HOME INSURANCE FOR RCN MEMBERS
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LIVERPOOL VICTORIA
Royal College of Nursing
FS21547082

For TextDirect: first dial 18001. Calls may be recorded. Mon-Fri 8am-9pm, Sat 8am-5pm, Sun 9am-5pm. The Royal College of Nursing acts as an Introducer Appointed Representative to the Liverpool Victoria group of companies for General Insurance.

RCN opposes closure of Hartlepool Assisted Reproduction Unit

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust has announced proposals to close its Assisted Reproduction Unit at the end of March, stating that it cannot recruit to a key embryologist post. The RCN campaigned against this move and we have also been representing the interests of members involved.



“We do not believe the closure will benefit patients or the broader staff base at the hospital,” said senior RCN officer Greg Canning. The RCN has met with affected staff, management and other key stakeholders, including other trade unions and local MPs. Greg attended an overview and scrutiny committee on 5 February at Hartlepool Council, which is opposed to the closure. However, the trust failed to attend the meeting despite being invited to engage in dialogue with local councillors, the public, and unions.

The RCN was also quoted in local newspapers. We told them that: “it was disappointing that the trust did not send anybody to answer the questions to which we all want answers. Specifically, the trust has claimed that the closure of this excellent unit is due to the fact that they can’t recruit sufficient staff to the unit. But they were able to recruit to the unit as recently as May 2015, and in the three months to December 2015, they made no effort at all to recruit.”

Demand for the service remains high. Senior RCN officer Greg Canning has written to all trust employees and RCN support is available via local reps and RCN Direct.

Member Support Services

As an RCN member, you can get free, confidential help and advice on a range of issues that affect you at home and at work. Services include legal help, careers advice, counselling, immigration, peer support, and welfare rights.

Find out more at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/membership/member-support-services>

You can also ring RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100 from 8am to 8pm, 365 days a year.

More consultations and reorganisations at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

The RCN is involved in a number of consultations and reorganisations at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Some of the official trust correspondence has suggested that another trade union is the lead contact point for member enquiries. This is incorrect. Please remember that if you are a member of the RCN and are affected by a proposed reorganisation within your employer, it is vital that you contact us as soon as possible, so that we can represent your best interests. Changes to your hours, place of work, or other working practices can have financial implications for you and your family, and it is vital that you get professional advice from the RCN before you agree to any new contract.

RCN visits North Cumbria hospital sites

The RCN has visited sites across and North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust this month. RCN Northern regional director Sarah Dodsworth was accompanied by the trust's director of nursing Gail Naylor as she visited the trust's paediatric services, medical ward, surgery, emergency admissions unit, and A&E department at West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven on 4 February.



During her visit Sarah was struck that the staff she had met were full of passion, positivity and commitment to delivering high-quality care. Speaking afterwards, she said: "We've all heard about the financial and structural challenges facing the trust, but I was truly inspired. For example, it was immediately clear to me that paediatrics at Whitehaven had a fully staffed complement, and staff were passionate, hard-working and committed to delivering excellence. This is a good news story that does not get told. Similarly, when I visited the medical ward, surgery ward, and emergency admissions unit, it was clear that staff felt very positive about the care that

they are able to deliver."

"Yes, it's hard work, yes, we need more staff but the sense of optimism at Whitehaven was refreshing to see. It was also clear that staff here have the confidence to speak up, and to tell their director of nursing when there is a particular problem. They also seem to have confidence that their concerns will get a fair hearing. One nurse told me: "We know it's tough and that some units are understaffed. But we also know that management are trying hard to fill these positions, so that we can continue to deliver safe care in Whitehaven."

The RCN is continuing to monitor the situation and work in partnership with NCUH.

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust to honour the living wage

Pay at Tees, Esk and Wear valleys NHS Foundation Trust will be increased to match the new minimum living wage announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last year.

The change, effective from 1 December 2015, means that no staff will be employed on band one of agenda for change pay scale anymore. It is anticipated that paying all staff at the living wage or above will cost the trust approximately £55,000 per year.

The idea was initially mooted by staff side and brought up at the Joint Consultative Committee, where it was met with a positive response and promptly agreed by the trust's executive team.

"There wasn't any resistance really," explained RCN rep Gordon Lees. "For an employer to be seen to be fair and just to its employees paying all staff at the living wage is the right thing to do. They did their sums and readily agreed to the idea."

RCN laminated handwashing guide for independent sector available

Effective hand washing is one of the most important measures for infection prevention, so the RCN has launched a new laminated guide for the independent sector. If you work for the independent sector you can get a free copy of the handwashing guide for your workplace - call 0345 772 6100, select option four, and quote publication code 004977.



Northern stalwart Gordon Lees elected to prestigious RCN position



RCN rep Gordon Lees, who works at Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and currently chairs the RCN Northern regional board, has just been elected to chair the RCN's national Membership and Representation Committee.

RCN regional director Sarah Dodsworth said: "Hearty congratulations to Gordon on his appointment – being elected by your peers to such an important position is a high accolade and a mark of the excellent activist he has been on members' behalf for all these years."

Gordon is the RCN's longest-serving representative. Below he talks about joining the RCN, becoming a rep, and how things have changed in his 40 years as a member.

What prompted you to join the RCN?

Just after I'd qualified as a general nurse in Hartlepool, I witnessed some bullying in the workplace. When I mentioned this to a colleague, they suggested I could support others through such incidents by joining a trade union.

I had heard about the work of the Royal College of Nursing and other trade unions but hadn't considered joining until this point. Some clinical staff were union-minded but awareness of the RCN was low; for example, a ward sister I spoke to was actually a member of the boilermakers' union, because her husband, a coalminer, had encouraged her to join.

I joined the RCN in 1975 and became active very quickly. Over 40 years later, I am still a proud member. When I started training as a mental health nurse I discovered that staff in South Tees Hospital were members of other trade unions, but not the RCN.

For the next 12 months I worked alongside a student who was on the same course as me to gain a foothold in the hospital. We recruited over 30 new members and formed a branch in the hospital. I also supported colleagues to set up a branch in Hartlepool around the same time.

In the early 1990s the introduction of a new national grading system, which hadn't been piloted, caused great distress for many nurses and had a big impact on pay and conditions. Appealing against an incorrect grading was a lengthy process and we were asked to represent lots of members over a very long period.

Why is representing other RCN members important to you?

I take great joy in representing members in the workplace. There are huge opportunities to fight against injustice. It's your job not only to uphold standards among frontline staff and their employers, but to represent the nursing profession too. You are the face of the RCN; the role can generate respect and credibility.

"There are huge opportunities to fight against injustice"

Why have you been a rep for so long?



Firstly, I believe in what the RCN stands for and its values, and these guide my practice both as a nurse and as a rep. But I'm also a strong advocate for partnership working and recognise there are significant gains to be made from working closely with managers, other trade unions and professional organisations. Lastly, I'm passionate about fairness and equality, recognising people's strengths and their limitations, and I believe that when in difficulty, everyone deserves a chance to explain and learn from their mistakes. No one is perfect.

Has your role as a rep changed over time?

I wouldn't say that being a rep is any easier now than it was 40 years ago, but experience does give you more confidence, particularly when representing members in grievances, disciplinarys and constant organisational change.

I've also worked on developing HR policies and job evaluation, which has given me a good sense of what is right and wrong, what is a reasonable expectation and an understanding and recognition of various clinical roles.

In 1960, RCN membership was opened up to men. How significant do you think this change was?

I think that this change was instrumental in encouraging more men to join the profession. When I was training to be a nurse in Hartlepool, I was one of three men on my training course. We were the first male students to train locally. Male nurses were much more likely to be found in mental health or learning disability nursing, perhaps because this was associated more with custodial or institutional care.

Men have brought a range of qualities to the profession and their contribution is regarded by some as a breath of fresh air. History has proven that men can provide quality care and can have a positive influence on the standards of care.

I think it's fair to say that some male nurses encountered a degree of prejudice, even when I qualified in the 1970s. For example, on one occasion, after I'd given a patient a check-up (blood pressure, temperature, pulse etc.) while on placement, a female senior staff member asked a female student nurse to check my work, which suggested that they didn't think men were capable of giving the same standards of care. Nowadays there is no such prejudice to male nurses, and I believe that work of the RCN has gone a long way to helping with that.

Why is it important that the RCN celebrates 100 years?

The centenary is a great opportunity, not only to celebrate the work of the RCN, but to sell the nursing profession, and to recognise just how far we have come in terms of standards of care and patient choice. In 40 years as an RCN rep I have seen a huge amount of change, and those who were retiring just as I qualified had arguably experienced even greater reform, with the introduction of the NHS in 1948, for example. As a profession we are constantly challenged and asked to learn new things and take on extra responsibilities. The centenary is the perfect opportunity to take stock of that and recognise just how invaluable nursing is.

Gordon is featured in March's issue of Activate, the RCN's magazine for representatives, committee members, regional board and national Council members.

Congratulations to new trainee reps on completing their foundation module



Congratulations to all aspiring RCN representatives who completed the foundation module of the RCN's learning and development programme for representatives in January.

They will now go on to complete their specialist module to become stewards, health and safety representatives or learning representatives, working towards a better working environment for the colleagues and ultimately better patient care.

How to become a rep

If you are interested in becoming a rep and would like to find out more, please visit <https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/rcn-reps/become-an-rcn-rep>

Sunderland-based safety rep Denise McLaughlin recommends getting involved:

“ The most enjoyable thing about being a steward is making a real difference to members and being able to help them through what sometimes are quite traumatic events for them at work... I'd really encourage everyone to be an RCN rep. It's opened a lot of doors, it's been a great experience. It's really busy and some days I wonder why I am doing it but I would never give it up because I enjoy it too much. ”



Denise's experience as a rep has led her to the position of chair of the RCN's UK Safety Reps' Committee.

Build a picture of modern nursing to celebrate the RCN's centenary

Our centenary survey aims to discover how you feel about your career, the health service and the future of the profession. Please share this link with your colleagues and help us build a true picture of the profession as we celebrate 100 years of the RCN. The results will form the basis of an RCN-generated media story ahead of Easter weekend. This survey is open until **Sunday 13 March**. Access it here: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/centenarysurvey/

Win one of 100 free one-year RCN memberships during our centenary year



The RCN is holding a number of competitions and prize draws across its centenary year, and is urging members to make sure their contact details are up-to-date.

According to Sarah Abley, Centenary Programme Manager: "Multiple free memberships and prizes are being given out every month this year, so there are plenty of chances to win. We wouldn't want anyone to miss out because they haven't updated their details with us so we're asking members to log in to [My RCN](#) and make sure their details are up to date."

Save the dates - RCN events

To book your place please email northern.region@rcn.org.uk

To find an event online, go to www.rcn.org.uk/events and filter the listings by region or keyword.

3 March – [Northern region board open session](#)

Lunch is at 12.00pm and the open session runs from 12.30pm – 3.00pm.

Avalon House, St Catherine's Court, Sunderland Enterprise Park, Sunderland, SR5 3XJ.

All RCN members are welcome to attend. Please let us know if you are coming for catering purposes.

15 March – [Multicultural nurses' group meeting](#), Sunderland. 10.00 am – 1.00 pm.

Avalon House, St Catherine's Court, Sunderland Enterprise Park, Sunderland, SR5 3XJ.

This meeting provides an opportunity for members to access support, professional development and networking opportunities.

14 April – [RCN Older People's Forum and British Geriatrics Society Joint Conference – Multidisciplinary Working in Team Settings](#). Birmingham, 9.30 am – 4.30 pm.

Find out more and book your place via our website.

19 April – ['Legal Eagles': are you up to date on the legal aspects that affect your role?](#) 10.00 am – 4.00 pm, Foundry Main Room, Castlegate, Melbourne Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 2QJ.

This continuous learning and development workshop will provide RCN representatives from the Northern, North West and Yorkshire and Humber regions with a chance to get updated about the legal aspects of safeguarding, whistleblowing and duty of candour, in order to be able to effectively represent and signpost RCN members. Apply online or email mandy.clark@rcn.org.uk

6 July – [Centenary celebrations of nursing excellence and innovation](#), 9.30am - 4.00 pm. The County Hotel, Neville Street, Newcastle NE1 5DF.



The RCN Northern region is teaming up with Yorkshire and the Humber region to mark the RCN's centenary with a conference to remember. Come along to help us celebrate.

The conference is free to RCN members, and you can join when you book.

Book your free place [online](#) or call 02920 54 64 60 and quote event number 2067.