Supporting learners: a quick guide to learning resources for RCN learning representatives
Supporting learners: a quick guide to learning resources for RCN learning representatives

Contents

1 Introduction 2
2 Starting out 4
3 Safe and effective practice 8
4 Career progression 11
5 Barriers to learning: 13
   – English, maths and ICT 13
   – Specific learning difficulties 16
Introduction

Learning representatives play a vital role in supporting an important element of the Royal College of Nursing’s work: helping health care workers to develop their skills and knowledge – thus, ultimately, improving standards of care.

As a Royal College of Nursing (RCN) learning representative, you:

- support members in the workplace by offering them information, advice and guidance and signposting them to relevant resources and opportunities
- work in partnership with your employer to protect and promote learning in the workplace
- work in partnership with your RCN colleagues to ensure that relevant and responsive learning opportunities are available and support high quality patient care.

The RCN provides hundreds of resources to support you in carrying out your role as a learning representative. Beyond our own publications, there are many further sources of information. This guide helps you find the key resources and guidance for some of the main areas of support you provide for RCN members.

The guide is divided into four themes:

- **Starting out**: resources to support students, new nurses, health care assistants (HCAs) and assistant practitioners (APs)
- **Safe and effective practice**: learning resources and activities to keep knowledge and skills up-to-date and support safe practice
- **Career progression**: possible career pathways, specialisms and forums
- **Barriers to learning**: English, maths and ICT (information and communications technology), and specific learning difficulties. Supporting individuals to overcome barriers to learning such as confidence with ICT, English and maths, or supporting members with dyslexia, dyspraxia or dyscalculia.

Working together

It is important that learning representatives support each other in finding the most effective resources for their work. So please share, and signpost to, the resources you find most valuable, via the RCN’s discussion zone at: www.rcn.org.uk/dz (click on the link to the learning representatives’ area).

Sources of information

Some resources are part of the member-only area of the RCN website. You will be able to access them using your membership number and password. If you have any difficulty, please contact RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100.

The majority of publications and guidance listed in this publication are accessible through the internet. However, you can also order hard copies of some RCN publications and posters through RCN Direct, who can also signpost you to publications on particular subjects if you are unable to find them online.
Starting out

Starting a health care career can be very daunting, both in terms of developing nursing practice and acquiring learning or study skills. RCN learning representatives can provide support and information to those embarking on a nursing career to help them find their feet and grow in confidence and competence.

Nurses, health care assistants and assistant practitioners may take a number of routes into nursing. These include:

- student nurses undertaking a qualification that will enable them to register with the NMC
- newly recruited HCAs who are not undertaking a specific programme of learning
- apprentice HCAs taking part in a recognised apprenticeship scheme
- trainee APs (TAPs) undertaking a foundation degree or equivalent.

Everyone entering the profession is expected to undertake some form of learning, be it studying for formal qualifications, undertaking mandatory training or being shown new skills or activities – some of which they may find unfamiliar or challenging.

The RCN provides a wealth of support for those new to nursing and has specific resources for nursing students, apprentices and new starters.

Resources: introduction to nursing

The RCN has two key resources which support nurses throughout their career, but can provide an excellent introduction to the fundamentals of nursing care. There is an extensive online learning section for each of these initiatives.

- *The Principles of Nursing Practice*
  www.rcn.org.uk/nursingprinciples

- *Dignity in Health Care*
  www.rcn.org.uk/practice/cpd/dignity

Resources: students

Becoming a student member of the RCN brings automatic membership of RCN Students, the RCN’s networking, information and lobbying group for student members. The group provides information, advice and guidance as well as free regional and national events.

- Online community

The RCN students’ online community is a great first stop for exploring what the RCN offers. They will find a range of resources to support them in practice and study. See www.rcn.org.uk/students

- RCN Student Information Officers (SIOs)

SIOs are themselves students. The RCN provides them with the latest information and publications for student members. You will find it useful to link up with your local SIO. Contact your regional/country office to find out who your nearest SIO is. If there isn’t one, help the student team to recruit one!

- RCN Library, Archives and Information Services

Through the RCN’s Library services, members can gain access to one of the largest specialist nursing libraries in the world including e-journals, e-books and databases to search. They can develop their information skills with online learning resources and ‘webinar’ (online seminar) training sessions.

www.rcn.org.uk/elibrary

Resources: new health care assistants (HCAs)

The RCN has a team dedicated to supporting the needs of HCAs and APs.

- Online community

There is a vibrant and active RCN online community for HCAs and APs. It signposts members to a number of valuable resources, including guidance on common issues such as accountability, delegation and record keeping. www.rcn.org.uk/health_care_support_workers
First steps for health care assistants

The RCN’s e-learning package is specifically designed for new HCAs. It helps them to learn, in their own time, at their own pace, the most important factors that will get them started in their health care career. This resource is also useful for students and anyone wishing to check out their knowledge and skills on a range of topics.

http://rcnhca.org.uk

Further information: Apprentices

Other sources of support available externally include:

- unionlearn
  The TUC’s information on apprenticeships. Look at the ‘For apprentices’ section.
  www.unionlearn.org.uk/our-work-and-projects/apprenticeships-are-union-business

- The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
  Information for potential apprentices and employers from the Government’s National Apprentice Service, which promotes apprenticeship opportunities.
  www.apprenticeships.org.uk
  Online mentoring for apprentices is provided through a joint initiative between the NAS and Horsesmouth, a social network for informal mentoring.
  www.horsesmouth.co.uk

Resources: apprentices

The health sector is increasingly recognising and using apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are becoming popular as an effective route towards gaining specific vocational qualifications. An apprenticeship can take health care assistants up to level 4 of their career framework. There is no apprenticeship framework for becoming a registered nurse, but some employers have developed tailored frameworks which are recognised by higher education institutions.

The RCN has produced a publication called Supporting apprentices in the workplace which is available online at: www.rcn.org.uk/publications

RCN resources such as Dignity in health care, Principles of nursing practice and First steps for health care assistants provide valuable learning for new apprentices and are a great addition to apprentice inductions and training.
Safe and effective practice

The public expects that all health and social care providers will have adequately trained staff who possess the necessary skills, competences and knowledge to provide effective care and treatment.

Health and social care providers who are committed to promoting excellent care know that a crucial element of providing a quality service is the continuing development of staff.

Professional and quality regulators acknowledge this connection between staff development and excellent care by including learning as part of the standards against which they assess organisations. Where an organisation fails to meet standards of patient care, either broadly or in specific incidents, learning can be considered as key to raising standards.

All health care professionals must continue to learn and develop skills so that they meet the expectations of employers, patients and the public. These include:

- regulatory requirements, for example, those of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)
- employer expectations such as the Knowledge and Skills Framework in the NHS, and progression through appraisals and personal development plans.

The RCN’s *Principles of nursing practice* make clear exactly what quality nursing care looks like and defines safe and effective practice. Standard F states that: ‘Nurses and nursing staff have up-to-date knowledge and skills, and use these with intelligence, insight and understanding, in line with the needs of each individual in their care’.

To keep you up to date, the RCN has a number of resources and guidance.

Resources: nursing practice issues

All members will find the RCN guidance on nursing practice issues essential in keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date. The guidance covers issues which are common to the majority of nursing specialisms, from dementia, pain, safeguarding and dignity, to clinical governance and leadership. See the full list of guidance at: www.rcn.org.uk/practice

---

**Resources: post-registration education and practice (Prep)**

All registered nurses need to meet, and demonstrate that they have met, the NMC Post Registration Education and Practice standards (Prep). The NMC Prep Handbook (2011) states: ‘You must have undertaken and recorded your continuing professional development (CPD) over the three years prior to the renewal of your registration’.

The Prep standard comprises three elements:

- undertaking at least 35 hours of learning activity relevant to your practice during the three years prior to your renewal of registration
- maintaining a personal professional profile of your learning activity
- complying with any request from the NMC to audit how you have met these requirements.

The RCN provides a great deal of support to help members meet and demonstrate Prep requirements.

- **Prep requirements**

  General guidance about Prep can be found at: www.rcn.org.uk/support/rcn_direct_online_advice

- **The RCN Learning Zone**

  This area of the RCN website helps members to develop learning skills, improve clinical skills and identify learning opportunities. Areas include:

  - Becoming a flexible learner: www.rcn.org.uk/beingaflexiblelearner
  - How to build a portfolio: www.rcn.org.uk/portfoliodevelopment
  - E-learning for clinical skills: www.rcn.org.uk/lzcs

---

Other resources: clinical guidelines

- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network: www.sign.ac.uk
- Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network: www.gain-ni.org

Career progression

The range of career opportunities for health care workers is greater than ever, but can be overwhelming. You may need to signpost members towards sources of information to help them make decisions about their future career development.

The RCN provides a wealth of information, advice and guidance about nursing specialisms and careers.

- **RCN Careers Service**
  This service can be a great place to start. It produces a number of factsheets profiling a range of nursing specialisms, with links to further RCN resources. The careers service advisers provide advice on writing applications, interview skills, career planning and continuing professional development.
  www.rcn.org.uk/careers

- **RCN forums**
  The RCN forums are groups of members working in a similar nursing specialty, and provide opportunities to share and develop best practice and network with other nurses. Each forum has its own online community and area on the website's Discussion Zone, packed with the latest news on the forum's work.
  www.rcn.org.uk/forums

Further information: Career progression

Some external sources of information to help support career progress include:

- **Career pathways in health**
  A useful online tool from Skills for Health (The Sector Skills Council for the health sector). The interactive resource allows users to explore different avenues that might be open to them as health care professionals.
  http://skillsforhealth.org.uk/career-framework
NHS careers

This website offers an insight into nursing specialisms, career pathways and post registration nursing courses.

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/nursing

Open University

The OU offers a wide range of courses for the nursing family. A free online course, *Learning to Change*, gives an introduction for people who are unsure of where to go to next or daunted by the prospect of entering a learning environment.

www.open.edu/openlearn/education/learning-change/content-section-0

English, maths and ICT

Some RCN members may find it difficult to engage with learning because they are not confident in their use of maths, English, and ICT. These learning areas are often described as ‘essential’, ‘basic’ or ‘functional’ skills. Challenges in these areas can often be well hidden and may manifest themselves in a lack of engagement with, or fear of, learning.

Resources: building confidence in maths and English

Someone who could be highly qualified (academically or vocationally) but have significant skills gaps in English or maths may develop strategies to disguise these challenges. You may notice that a colleague is reluctant to take part in learning, complete written documentation or undertake duties that involve maths without support or a buddy.

Most health care organisations offer great support for those wanting to brush up on their English and maths, but your nursing colleagues may feel reluctant to take part because they may not wish to disclose their learning need. You can offer them a safe and confidential space to discuss their challenges, and signpost them to more discreet ways to refresh their skills or boost their confidence.

- RCN Learning Zone numeracy skills
  
  www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone/skills

- GoLearn – GoLearn is an online learning tool for maths and English. It was developed in collaboration between the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and Tribal, a global training company. Unionlearn introduced the package to unions in late 2012. GoLearn provides a discreet, learner-led approach that may suit health care staff. It is an interactive resource which allows learners to assess their existing knowledge and provides a range of learning material to develop or refresh knowledge if required. The RCN is piloting the GoLearn resource until March 2014. For more information contact: emily.spencer-rigby@rcn.org.uk
**Further information: English and maths**

A useful external resource is Move On, which provides information and encouragement to engage with learning, and has a wide range of resources and mini tests.

www.move-on.org.uk

**Resources: confidence in IT and computers**

A lack of knowledge, or confidence in using computers can be a big barrier to learning. ICT now plays a large role in nursing practice, and proficiency is important to career progression. Email and the internet or intranets have become the main form of communication in many workplaces and in learning, training and CPD. Patient records can be kept in electronic form, and there are many other kinds of ehealth developing, from online information sources to remote monitoring of patients’ physical data.

Many workplaces will provide support and training for staff to brush up on their IT skills, however, as with English and maths, members may feel more at ease discussing their confidence in ICT with a learning representative. Learning representatives can look more broadly at how technology is used in life as well as at work and use topics such as paying bills on line, or using smart phones, as a way to engage members with ICT.

- **RCN’s ehealth learning package**
  
  This helps to provide understanding of how computers are used in the workplace.
  
  www.rcnhca.org.uk/ehealth

---

**Further information: confidence in IT and computers**

- **BBC resources**

  The BBC offers some of the best resources to get people started with ICT. Learners will probably need someone to work through it with them, so become a ‘digital champion’ and spare a couple of hours to help get them started.

  www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/courses
Specific learning difficulties

Specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia can limit health care professionals in providing safe and effective practice and in career progression. Dyslexia affects 10 per cent of the population. Many people build their own strategies to deal with it, but some may have not.

Specific learning differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia are classified as a disability under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. It is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the basis of their disability. Individuals are entitled to receive reasonable adjustments to help them overcome their difficulties.

Lots of individuals who have dyslexia have built strategies to deal with it, but some have not and we need to think how best to support and help these individuals to progress in their nursing careers.

Try and encourage openness with managers so that reasonable adjustments can be discussed. Sometimes it’s just not reasonable to make the adjustments requested, as the focus, quite rightly, is on the health and safety of patients, but work with the support of your RCN steward if you feel that a colleague isn’t being treated fairly.

RCN guides

You can learn how best to support members with these learning challenges by studying the following RCN guides on the subject, which can be accessed at www.rcn.org.uk/publications:

- Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a toolkit for nursing staff
- Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a summary guide for managers
- Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a guide for managers and practitioners
- Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a pocket guide.
The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies

March 2013
Review date March 2014

RCN Online
www.rcn.org.uk

RCN Direct
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

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

Publication code 004 389