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

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Published by the Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London
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020 7409 3333

November 2017
Publication code: 006 495

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Engaging with your Member of Parliament (MP)

Talking directly to your MP is a great way to ensure your voice is heard by the person elected to represent your interests in Parliament. MPs have a responsibility to represent their constituents’ views and amplify their voices to help shape and scrutinise the work of Government.

You can play a key role in building a good relationship with your MP. It’s really important that they have the opportunity to hear your experiences, understand why issues are happening and are able to consider solutions which they can help carry through to Parliament.

Getting in touch with your MP can feel intimidating. We hope this guide will give you the confidence to contact your MP and arrange to meet them. Remember, MPs are elected to represent their constituents and are usually happy to help if they can.

How this toolkit can help you

This toolkit is designed as a practical guide to help you talk to your MP. It has all the information you need to contact them and prepare for a meeting, along with some top tips on developing the relationship.

It includes:

- details of how to contact your MP
- advice on preparing for a meeting with your MP
- information on what you can ask your MP to do
- tips on following up with your MP and feeding back
- templates to help you contact your MP
- a checklist to help you at every stage.

We’re here to help. If you’re thinking about contacting your MP, it’s a good idea to speak to the communications manager in your local Royal College of Nursing (RCN) office. They will be able to tell you if other members of staff at the RCN have had any contact with your MP and if so, what kinds of issues have been raised before. You can find the relevant contact information for your region or country in Appendix 4.

It’s important to remember that the RCN is not affiliated to any political party. Our members also come from a wide range of backgrounds. We need to work alongside organisations and individuals who champion our causes to achieve the best deal for our members and for patients. We also need to talk constructively with people who don’t agree with us. An MP might not agree with you or with the RCN about some issues, but it is important to be respectful. Consider how you can help change their mind.

To get politicians to take action we need to use a range of campaigning tactics to engage all political parties, and ensure support for the issues that matter to you. This includes Peers, Assembly Members from Northern Ireland and Wales and Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Health policy is a matter for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies as well as the UK Government. While MPs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland won’t have a direct say in all health matters, they will be interested in issues that affect their constituents and are likely to raise issues with their relevant national parties.
MPs, Lords and offices

MPs and Members of the Lords sit in the two Chambers of Parliament scrutinising the Government and debating legislation. A range of services are provided to assist them in their role.

MPs

Find your MP and view lists of MPs by alphabetical name and constituency, by gender, political party and select committee membership

- Current State of the Parties
- Select Committee membership
- Find your MP help

Lords

Select from a range of search options to find out more about Members of the House of Lords and their contact details

- Membership of the House of Lords
- Deceased Lords
- New Lords
- Ineligible Lords
- Retired Lords
- Non-attending Lords

Follow Parliament

- Twitter – keep up to date with what’s happening
- Flickr – images of events and buildings
- YouTube – watch films of work and history
- Facebook – become a fan of Parliament on Facebook
- Instagram – images of events and archive

Related information

Find out about the role and work of MPs, Lords and key staff of Parliament.

- What MPs do
- What Lords do
- What principal officers do
How to contact your MP

You can find details about how to contact your MP on the Parliament website:
www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps

The vast majority of MPs have websites and they will often include contact information.

MPs spend most of their week (Monday to Thursday) in Parliament, and usually spend Fridays in their constituencies. This is worth bearing in mind when requesting a meeting. The majority of MPs host local “surgeries” either by appointment or drop-in. These sessions are there for them to listen to the concerns of local people.

Getting in touch

It is really important that when you contact your MP you provide your address, including your postcode, as MPs are only required to respond to people who live within their constituency.

Whichever method(s) you use to get in touch with your MP, there are three key things that you should include.

1. Tell them who you are, your address and what you are contacting them about.
2. Explain how the issue affects you personally and if/how this impacts on the rest of their constituency.
3. State clearly how you would like them to help and make a specific ask for action.

Make the issue you want to raise with them locally relevant. Your MP will also want to know how national issues are impacting on the local community – both you and the patients you care for. For example, staffing levels and the pay cap may be making recruitment at your place of work difficult and therefore impacting on staff morale and wellbeing as well as patient outcomes.

We suggest emailing your MP to request a meeting and following up with a call a week later to their constituency office if you haven’t received a reply. While letter writing is also important, MPs receive a large amount of constituency correspondence and it can often take a while for their office to respond.

Send an email

MPs receive a high volume of emails so when you communicate your message should be clear, to increase the chances of getting a faster response. There is a draft email you can use and adapt in Appendix 1.

Send a letter

MPs have offices both in their constituency and in Westminster. It is generally better for you to write to the constituency address. As above, it is really important that you include your address and postcode.

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Response to @sinky72 from Stockton North MP Alex Cunningham
Pick up the phone
On the Parliament website you can find a phone number for your MP’s Westminster office.

You can call your MP’s constituency office and ask to book an appointment. Before you ring, you can check online to see if your MP is publicising drop-in sessions for the public, for example at a supermarket or on the high street.

When you call you will probably talk with someone who works for the MP. These staff often take a very high volume of phone calls so be prepared with what you want to say. In those conversations, all you are trying to achieve is to get them to communicate information to your MP – they are not a decision-maker.

It is still usually better to email and/or send a letter in writing first, so that your MP has time to consider your issue.

Many MPs are on social media, so you may also be able to tweet directly at your MP. In a tweet, you can link them to further information regarding the issue you are raising or ask them to meet with you.

Asking your MP to take action

Getting prepared
Once you have arranged a meeting with your MP, let your local RCN office know. They will be happy to talk you through what you need to do next and help you prepare.

You can arrange to meet your MP by yourself or as part of a small group. If you are planning to go as a small group, make sure you give the MP’s office advance notice so they are aware.

Consider what you want to share. Your stories are one of your most valuable assets. Describing your experiences of issues you face as part of the nursing community – and the solutions you think will work – will help your MP understand what matters to you and give them further reason to support you. Before you make contact, think about what you want to share and make sure you are fully comfortable with sharing your personal experience.

You are the expert on your experiences. You can also describe to your MP how nursing staff in their constituency are affected by these issues, share your observations of the potential impact on patient care and flag any issues they need to be aware of. Please remember not to share confidential information.

Find out about your MP. Doing some research to find out what issues your MP is particularly passionate about, and what they’ve spoken about publicly, will help you. It may also give you insight into how they feel about the issue you want to discuss. By preparing in this way, you can also think through how you will make your case.

Here are places you can research:

- Your MP’s website, Twitter or Facebook feed. These will give you a good understanding of your MP’s current priorities, who they are responding to and how they communicate.
- Hansard Online https://hansard.parliament.uk outlines everything your MP has spoken or written about in their career in Parliament. You can search it using keywords about nursing, health and social care to help you find relevant information.
- TheyWorkForYou www.theyworkforyou.com/mps provides a good overview of your MP’s voting record in debates and law, in areas such as health and social care.

Give your MP clear and useful information. Identifying short, specific key messages and having facts ready is an important part of writing to, calling or meeting your MP. To assist you in a meeting, bring your research and remember to take notes of the conversation – you don’t need to memorise everything.
Be honest and friendly. Sometimes an MP will ask questions that you won’t have the answer to. It’s fine to say that you don’t have the information to hand but that you will follow up with it after the meeting. This also provides you with a really helpful chance to follow up on any action they have promised to undertake on your behalf.

If in doubt, check it out. Communications managers in RCN offices are great sounding boards and they will give you a steer if you are unsure. See page 12.

Top tip: prepare an agenda for the meeting in advance so you are clear about what you want to discuss and what action you want your MP to take. We have included an example in Appendix 2 (on page 10) to help you structure your meeting.

MPs may ask for an agenda in advance. If they request one, you can email them bullet points about what you want to discuss.

Making the most of your meeting

Meetings can often be short so it’s important you are prepared. Don’t be surprised if the conversation is focused and factual. On average, meetings last for about 20-30 minutes.

Give your MP useful information. As well as telling your story, take along copies of any briefing materials or written materials that will help make your case.

Tell your MP how they can help you. The first thing most MPs want to know is how they can help. If you are meeting your MP for the first time, have a clear idea of one thing you’d like to ask them to do.

If your MP is supportive and keen to get more involved in nursing issues, you can then ask them to consider taking a wider range of actions.

Actions in the local community

Ask your MP to sign up to be a Nursing Champion. This is great way for them to show nursing staff in their constituency they value and support you. There’s a sign-up form in Appendix 5 (page 13), which you can flip over to use in a photo opportunity. You can find more information about Nursing Champions at www.rcn.org.uk/nursing-champions

If they are happy to take a picture with you, post it on social media. If you have a personal Twitter or Facebook account you can promote the meeting and share your picture. On Twitter, remember to tag @theRCN so that others can see.

Invite your MP to attend a local event where they can spend time with you and/or the nursing community, learning about the work you do and why it matters to their constituency. This is likely to have to be a Friday, Saturday or Sunday when they are working in their constituency office.

Ask your MP if they will consider hosting a meeting with local leaders or neighbouring MPs to discuss how everyone can work together to support the nursing community.
Ask your MP if they would be interested in shadowing you in your workplace and learning more about what nursing staff do on a daily basis. You will need to ask your employer for permission to do this. Again, check in with your RCN communications manager, who can advise you on the best way to arrange this.

Ask your MP if they would consider sending a press release to the local newspaper about the meeting. They may wish to blog about the meeting on their website or include information in their regular updates to constituents.

Offer to keep your MP updated about health services in their constituency.

### Actions in Parliament

You can ask your MP to raise your concerns in the House of Commons.

There is a range of things they can do:

• formally write to a minister and raise an issue on your behalf
• advocate on your behalf to local agencies
• sign an Early Day Motion (EDMs allow MPs to draw attention to an event or cause; MPs register their support by signing individual motions)
• ask a parliamentary question that the UK Government must respond to
• raise your issue verbally in a debate.

### Following up with your MP and feeding back

After the meeting, it’s really important that you follow up with a thank you email or letter to your MP. Don’t wait for them to write to you first. This is crucial in keeping MPs engaged and it’s also a great opportunity to remind them about what action they agreed to take. It also asks them to respond to you on specific areas, and will help compel them to write back to you.

**Keep your regional or country office updated.** They’ll be really keen to hear about the meeting, how it went and what was agreed. Call or email your regional or country communications manager so they can capture the intelligence and help you with any follow-up actions that have been agreed – for example, they can help you promote the meeting by tweeting about it or advise on the best way to organise a shadowing opportunity for the MP with your employer.

A list of all the region and country communications managers is in Appendix 4 on page 12.
Appendix 1: Template message to request a meeting

Download this template at www.rcn.org.uk/engage-your-mp

Subject line: Meeting request: [insert your name], [nurse/midwife/health care support worker] at [insert your employer]

Dear [insert your MP’s name] MP

I am a [nurse/midwife/health care support worker] working in [insert constituency], and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to support the nursing community.

*[Add personal or local information that will help illustrate the issues you are concerned about. Make it as personal as you are comfortable with. How do national issues like pay, poor staff morale and staffing levels affect local services and patients? It is important to highlight what the impact is on your local community.]*

Nursing is a rewarding and skilled profession. I love my job but over the last few years it has become increasingly challenging. Cuts to my pay, pressures on staffing levels and an increasing demand on services are making it difficult to deliver the care our community needs and deserves.

I’m also keen to update you on local health and care services, share feedback from nursing staff and explore actions we can take to support them and their patients.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

[Insert your name]
[Insert your address and postcode]
[Insert your contact telephone number]
Appendix 2: Sample agenda for a meeting with an MP

Drafting an agenda is a good way to help you prepare for a meeting. It will set out the issues you want to discuss and the actions you want your MP to take.

Sometimes an MP’s office might ask for an agenda in advance. You can email them your discussion points in bullet point form.

Below is an example of agenda items you can use for your meeting.

We suggest checking with the communications manager in your region or country for local data. See Appendix 4.

Download this at www.rcn.org.uk/engage-your-mp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Key message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>RCN members in your constituency</strong></td>
<td>Knowing how many RCN members there are in a constituency shows the potential voting power our members have. Your RCN office can give you figures for your area. For contact details, see Appendix 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Campaign issues</strong></td>
<td>The key messages for the campaign you are meeting your MP to discuss can be found on the RCN website <a href="http://www.rcn.org.uk">www.rcn.org.uk</a>. Remember to use your personal story to illustrate them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Local services</strong></td>
<td>Talk about how your services are being affected by the campaign issues. Are services being cut? Is your A&amp;E under pressure? How is this affecting people who live in the area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>How MPs can help</strong></td>
<td>Discuss the actions MPs can take to support nursing:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Invite them to shadow you for a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask them to raise your concerns in Parliament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask them to show visible support on social media – take a picture with them and tweet it (remember to include @thercn or your region or country office Twitter handle).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask them to sign up to be a Nursing Champion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>Tell your MP how you can support them. You could offer to set up a meeting with more members or check if they’d like a shadowing experience. You can also offer to keep them updated about health issues in your constituency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Checklist

This checklist will ensure you’re prepared at each stage of the process.

☐ Checking in with your RCN office
  • Check in with the communications manager in your region or country, who will help you prepare and suggest some follow-up actions.

☐ Contacting your MP
  • Make it as personal as you are comfortable with – tell your MP why you are writing and what you want to talk to them about, explain how your issue affects you personally and state clearly how you would like them to help.
  • Chase, chase and chase again – did you write/email/call your MP’s office to make an appointment? Have you heard from them? If not, have you followed up?

☐ Preparing to meet your MP
  • Have you researched your MP? Do you know if they have supported nursing issues, such as pay, in the past? Do you know if they are supportive? If not, what arguments have you prepared to convince them?
  • Have you prepared a list of issues you want to talk about? An agenda can be a helpful guide.
  • Are you clear about what you want your MP to do? Remember, there are some offers you can make to encourage your MP to get involved and some key actions you can ask them to take.

☐ Make sure to feed back
  • Have you followed up with your MP to thank them and remind them of the action they agreed to? How do you plan to stay in contact?
  • What about promoting the meeting? Is your MP going to tweet about it or inform local media or constituents through their newsletter?
  • Finally, have you contacted your region or country communications manager to keep them in the loop? Is there anything else you need from them?
Appendix 4: Regional and country communication contact points

**Regional communication managers in England**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Kevin Terry</td>
<td>07843 326283, <a href="mailto:Kevin.Terry@rcn.org.uk">Kevin.Terry@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Danielle Scapens</td>
<td>07789 371462/01204 552479, <a href="mailto:Danielle.Scapens@rcn.org.uk">Danielle.Scapens@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelly Dooley</td>
<td>01204 552426, <a href="mailto:Kelly.Dooley@rcn.org.uk">Kelly.Dooley@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td>Kevin Terry</td>
<td>0113 3860512/07843 326283, <a href="mailto:Kevin.Terry@rcn.org.uk">Kevin.Terry@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>Tim Baggs</td>
<td>01158507623/07739874354, <a href="mailto:Tim.Baggs@rcn.org.uk">Tim.Baggs@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>Tim Baggs</td>
<td>07843 326283, <a href="mailto:Tim.Baggs@rcn.org.uk">Tim.Baggs@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Helen Wigginton</td>
<td>01635 232816/07739 875081, <a href="mailto:Helen.Wigginton@rcn.org.uk">Helen.Wigginton@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>Tracey Roberts</td>
<td>01392 357019/07841497692, <a href="mailto:Tracey.Roberts@rcn.org.uk">Tracey.Roberts@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Lyndsay Buckland</td>
<td>01284 717733, <a href="mailto:Lyndsay.Buckland@rcn.org.uk">Lyndsay.Buckland@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>Tom Colclough</td>
<td>020 7841 3375, <a href="mailto:Tom.Colclough@rcn.org.uk">Tom.Colclough@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
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</table>

**Country communication and public affairs leads**

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>John Knape</td>
<td>028 90 384 600, <a href="mailto:John.Knape@rcn.org.uk">John.Knape@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Lisa Turnbull</td>
<td>029 20 680 738, <a href="mailto:Lisa.Turnbull@rcn.org.uk">Lisa.Turnbull@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Carol Harris</td>
<td>0131 662 6175/07976624196, <a href="mailto:Carol.Harris@rcn.org.uk">Carol.Harris@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>Lizzie Dowd</td>
<td>020 7647 3840, <a href="mailto:Lizzie.Dowd@rcn.org.uk">Lizzie.Dowd@rcn.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Become a Nursing Champion

As a Nursing Champion you will be an advocate for the nursing community in your constituency and represent their views in Parliament.

What you can do to support nursing staff in your area

Your support is invaluable. As an MP, you have the opportunity to show your constituents how much you value the work of nursing staff and the care they deliver every day for patients.

We will write to you and share information about our members in your constituency and how you can engage with them. We’ll also suggest some actions you can take to champion nursing issues on behalf of the nursing staff in your community.

What we can do for you

We can set up meetings for you with our members, help organise opportunities for you to shadow frontline nursing staff and keep you up to date on key nursing issues.

Sign up now

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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Please send your completed form to:
John Considine, Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN, or email to John.Considine@rcn.org.uk
More information is available at www.rcn.org.uk/nursing-champions
Proud to be a nursingchampion