

What We Give



The Value of Reps:
In Our Own Words



Hello,

Every day, in workplaces around the UK, RCN representatives are making a difference. Whether it's helping someone to develop their career, checking that staff are working safely or supporting members through the most difficult of times when they face losing everything – our reps are there, every step of the way.

Often they are working behind the scenes, with many members and employers having little idea of the huge contribution they make. But now we think it's time to celebrate our unsung heroes, showcasing what they do and their importance to all of us.

In the summer of 2017, we invited a group of reps from all four corners of the UK to share their experiences and feelings. These are their stories, told in their own words.

They show us what reps give to members and organisations – fighting for justice and fairness, working in partnership, and supporting nursing staff at their most vulnerable and frightened. We hope that this book helps you value their work as much as we do.

Denise McLaughlin, Chair of UK Safety Reps' Committee
Graham Revie, Chair of UK Stewards' Committee
Karen Sanders, Chair of UK Learning Reps' Committee

Chris Cox, Director of Member Relations

Learning reps

Support the ambitions of our members by promoting learning and career development.

Safety reps

Help to ensure our members operate within a healthy and safe working environment.

Stewards

Protect the rights of our members, ensuring fair treatment on all employment-related matters.



Ali Upton

**Ali Upton,
Safety Rep, South East**

“The word that captures how I feel about my role as a rep is ‘selfless’. I like crafting and it helps me relax, so I made the collage (below) from lots of RCN publications. I used the reps’ *Activate* magazine because we’re all active and we’re passionate about what we do. I liked using the rainbow flag because we all come from diverse backgrounds and it’s our individuality and diversity that makes us really powerful. There’s a compass too because we come from different countries, backgrounds and nationalities, but the RCN brings us together, as one.”



**A diverse group,
working together**

Sharing our own stories

**Jeremy Davies,
Learning Rep and Steward, Wales**

“By seeing what happened to me, and the support I received throughout from the RCN, staff have seen at first hand that the RCN is effective in the workplace. Now they know there is someone they can turn to for help and they are not alone. All they have to do is pick up the phone.”



Marie Hooper

**Bev Baker,
Steward, West Midlands**

“A long-standing member of staff was accused of physically abusing a patient. She was devastated by the allegation, strongly denied it, and felt emotionally broken. She told me how she’d dressed up as a nurse as a little girl – it was all she ever wanted to do.

“Like me, she’d spent all her life nursing and I could completely empathise with the thought of having everything taken away. So I put myself in her shoes and fought for her. I was determined to make sure her passion was restored. When we presented our evidence, there was not a dry eye in the house, including mine. Clearing her name and safeguarding her reputation were the most important things to her.

“At the end, she received the lowest possible sanction. When she realised she could still carry on working in the job she loved it was an extraordinary moment and something I’ll never forget. It will stay with me for the rest of my life. If I’d not been there, she would have given up her job.

“It’s days like this that make me want to continue as an RCN rep. If I can just have one of these a year, I’ll take the rest.”

**Linda Rumbles,
Safety Rep and Steward, Scotland**

“I approach each member case with an open mind and I have a strong sense of fairness. I take the time to listen, ask questions, and then listen again. When I first did my RCN training, the tutor said, ‘The devil is in the detail,’ and I’ve never forgotten that. One of my members said, ‘Not only did Linda believe in me, she believed me.’ It’s important to remember that you can support the person, even if you don’t support the situation.”

**Margaret Devlin,
Steward, Northern Ireland**

“We help our members see the reality of their situation and we make sure they are always treated fairly and given enough support to deal with any issues. It’s my role to ensure they do no harm to their patients, themselves or the profession. Any of us can make a mistake, but I try to help the member realise how it happened, and what can be done to reduce the risks in the future.”

Achieving fairness and justice

Making your voice heard

**Jayne Greenop,
Steward, North West**

“I’m always really keen to ensure that our members get the best possible representation. I’m very aware that we are representatives – not lawyers – and that we’re in a local employment disciplinary process and not a court of law. But I believe that we must do everything we can to make sure our members’ voices are heard and where needed, untruths are exposed.”

**Lee Fretwell,
Steward, East Midlands**

“In my Trust, the challenges have included bringing a fragmented staff side together to work as a united front, with members’ concerns at the fore rather than everyone pulling in different directions. We’ve also had to persuade the organisation to see the benefits of working in partnership with trade unions, including the RCN. I’ve had to be extremely persistent in knocking on doors and saying our voice must be heard. We’ve rebuilt bridges that had been burned. Now my Trust is engaging with us and we’re beginning to instigate positive change. We’re seeing green shoots.”



Jeremy Davies

**Catherine Salter,
Safety Rep, Wales**

“Workplace inspections are central to our work as safety reps. If we’re not asking the right questions or there is no procedure to follow, it makes them a tick-box exercise and meaningless. Looking back through years of past inspections, I found that the same problems were being identified year on year. I found this very frustrating and a waste of time for everyone involved. It also undermined our role, as staff could see that despite our presence, nothing would change.

“So I set up a working group to update the inspection form, asking the right questions and devising a flow chart of how inspections should be carried out and actions progressed. I feel positive about this work because it helps to raise the profile of health and safety in the workplace, whilst actively addressing concerns. Even though a majority of members won’t know about this change, I know it will benefit them in their working lives. I feel proud of this work, but I’m not precious about it. Change is good and I hope it continues to evolve over time.”

**Ellie McManus,
Learning Rep, North West**

“The NHS is changing at the moment and being creative and innovative is so important. I introduced an organisation-wide preceptorship programme for all newly registered nurses. I believe it was the only NHS one to be accredited by the RCN at that time. Throughout, I had brilliant support from the Trust’s RCN branch, senior nursing team and education teams. I felt empowered to do what needed to be done. Where there were difficulties, we worked together to overcome them.”

**Deanna Rylance,
Steward, East Midlands**

“At my Trust they were going to get rid of an allowance. Staff relied on this money. I was determined to get what was rightfully ours and so I campaigned for all current staff to keep it. I’m like a dog at a bone and I will fight for everyone.”

**Improving
working lives**



Yvonne Lewis (main image, R), chats with Deanna Rylance

Challenging perceptions

**David McKerr,
Safety Rep and Steward,
Northern Ireland**

“We’ve created an RCN presence, with more face-to-face contact, visiting all areas at different times of day, including during the night shift. We’ve also recruited 22 new RCN reps over the last couple of years, up from a handful. How staff perceive the RCN has changed – from being not just a trade union, but a professional body that supports nursing staff throughout their careers. There’s much better awareness now about what the RCN can do for members. People will often only come to you when they’re in trouble, but the RCN is about much more than that. Why would nursing staff go anywhere else?”

**Jayne Greenop,
Steward, North West**

“A lot of my work is dealing with individual members’ difficulties, such as warnings over sickness absence, but I think that’s the kind of day-to-day work that can have a big impact. Even if someone is eventually dismissed, I think having someone on their side makes a massive difference to them. Very often they will say they have received no support at all, aside from their rep.”

① ('vælju:) *n* **1** the desirability of a thing, often in respect of some property such as usefulness or exchangeability. **2** an amount, esp. a material or monetary one, considered to be a fair exchange in return for a thing: *the value of the picture is £10,000*. **3** satisfaction: *value for money*. **4** precise meaning or significance. **5** (*pl*) the moral principles or accepted standards of a person or group. ♦ *vb* **values, valuing, valued**. (*tr*) **6** to assess or estimate the worth, merit, or desirability of. **7** to have a high regard for, esp. in respect of worth, usefulness, merit, etc.

Value

**Kevin Morley,
Steward, Northern**

“NMC revalidation was causing some members to feel stressed and anxious. I made a plan to support them, collecting information and putting it in a foolproof guide. Teaching and awareness sessions were also rolled out through five teams. I was very pleased with the outcome. After it was mentioned in the RCN’s magazine, others asked for the pack and for support. I felt a great sense of achievement through helping others.”

**Kathy Lawrie,
Safety Rep and Steward, South West**

“If something is not right, I will stand up for members and work with them to try to put it right. Sometimes you can feel pressure to achieve something for staff, especially when you know what the impact will be on their jobs, morale and patient care. While you can listen to the arguments respectfully and take part in consultation, it’s important to remain steadfast.”

Supporting members

**Alex Scott,
Steward, East Midlands**

“Whether someone is a chief executive, a director, a nurse, a porter or a cleaner, we’re all cogs in a wheel and we all have a role to play in delivering services to patients. Across my Trust, at any one time, we used to have around 35 to 40 disciplinary cases. Where I work, this approach has resulted in formal cases dropping from 40 to below 10, with the reduction being maintained over two years.”

“If you want to embed values in your organisation, you have to live them, not superimpose them. You have to feel that you’re not blamed, and that you’re supported. That’s not to say there can’t be some challenging conversations. But if you treat staff with dignity and respect and make them feel valued, the chances are very high that they will treat their colleagues and their patients in the same way.”

**Yvonne Lewis,
Steward, Yorkshire and Humber**

“We work very well here with managers, meeting monthly. They listen to what we say and will reword something if we have worries about how it might be interpreted. Of course we don’t always get everything we want, but they will always consider our comments and sometimes just changing a word or two can make all the difference.

“We try to work collaboratively. It’s not about who’s right and who’s wrong, raising your voice and going in for a fight, but about being professional and having a healthy debate. A lot of nursing staff can think their views are not listened to, so it’s very important that they know we’re taken seriously.”

Working in partnership



(L) Vicky Houghton and (R) Denise Crampsie



Deanna Rylance

Celebrating nursing

**Gina Holmes,
Steward, Yorkshire and Humber**

“I wanted to do something different for International Nurses’ Day. It was a chance to celebrate what we do and the difference we make.

“I got in touch with some play leaders at the Trust, and they helped children make Happy Nurses’ Day cards. We then arranged for them to be delivered to every single area where nurses were working. I decided that wasn’t enough, so a friend helped to create smiley face T-shirts saying International Nurses’ Day, which were worn by some staff, and we had balloons with the same design. We organised a staff photo shoot, inviting play leaders, nurses and senior managers, including our Chief Executive.

“It’s a big Trust and it was a feat trying to reach everyone in all four sites on the same day, but it was worth the effort to make them feel valued and included. It put a smile on people’s faces for the first time in a long time. And it was so good, we’ve been asked to do it again next year.”

PROUD

NEVER GIVE UP!

EXPECTATIONS
REALITY
VALUE
FAIRNESS
SUPPORT
FACILITATE

Value reps

DIRECT
Engagement

Steward

PERSEVERANCE
EMPOWERMENT

as Cecilia said
"We are the ones
who run towards
the trouble"

... for change

HEROES!

We are only
human - REPS
can suffer too!!

Honoured

ed" proud

ges

"I

UNDERSTANDING

JUSTICE

BELIEVE

Personal development opportunities

DISBELIEF

RELIEVED

OVERWHELMED

TEARS

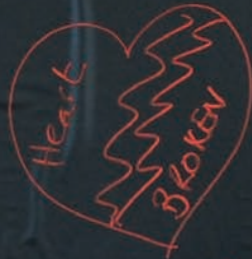
SHOCK #SUPPORT



INTEGRITY

VALUE

be the change you want to see.



Innovation #WARRIORS

HONEST

Value

APPRECIATION

FIGHT

REJOICE!

Respect



Reflect

SUPPORT

Collaborative working between all types of REPS in very beneficial.

RECOGNITION

Resourceful

Diversity

Professionalism

Attention to detail

"I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE"

COMPASSION

If I'd not been there, she'd have given up her job

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IDE

What We Gain



The Value of Reps:
In Our Own Words



Royal College of Nursing

Hello,

In the summer of 2017 we invited a group of RCN reps from every region and country of the UK to come together, to share their experiences of what the role means to them.

They told us how being a rep has changed their own lives for the better, creating a raft of personal benefits they could never have anticipated.

Some talked about how their confidence and self-esteem has blossomed. Others are forging enduring friendships, which provide support, honesty – and laughter. And many spoke of the pride they feel in their achievements. You can read their stories here, told in their own words.

And if you feel inspired to join them, you can find out more at:

www.rcn.org.uk/become-a-rep

Denise McLaughlin, Chair of UK Safety Reps' Committee
Graham Revie, Chair of UK Stewards' Committee
Karen Sanders, Chair of UK Learning Reps' Committee

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Support the ambitions of our members by promoting learning and career development.

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Respect

**Kathy Lawrie,
Safety Rep and Steward, South West**

“You may need to walk a fine line as you challenge senior managers, manage members’ expectations and resolve difficulties with HR. My aim is to be respected rather than liked, and if you can gain respect from all of those people you know that you’re doing a good job. My advice is seek respect, not attention – it lasts longer.”



Ellie McManus

① (rɪˈspekt) *n* **1** an attitude or deference, admiration, or esteem; regard. **2** the state of being honoured or esteemed. **3** a detail, point or characteristic: *they differ in some respects*. **4** reference or relation (esp. in **in respect of, with respect to**). **5** polite or kind regard; consideration: *respect for people's feelings*. **6** (often *pl*) an expression of esteem or regard (esp. in **pay one's respects**). ♦ *vb* (*tr*) **7** to have an attitude of esteem towards: *to respects one's elders*. **8** *Arch.* to concern or refer to. [C14: from L *rēspicere* to look back, pay attention to, from RE- + *specere* to look]

Respect



Dionne Daniel

**Denise Crampsie,
Steward, West Midlands**

“I was fairly confident I could get a disciplinary case against two members dismissed, but at the same time very nervous about possibly letting them down. I believe that everyone should be treated with fairness and honesty and staff give their best when they are valued and trusted. The two members had arrived in my office defeated and deflated, when usually they are both positive and bubbly. Knowing they denied the allegation, it upset me to see them like this, but it made me determined to do my best for them to influence the final outcome.

“I kept going, with the support of my RCN officer and encouragement from staff side. On the day of the hearings, I was up very early as I couldn’t sleep, but I managed to still my nerves and go in confidently. When the outcomes were delivered, and there was no case to answer, I was elated. It reminded me of why I am an RCN rep.”

**A sense of
achievement**

**Liz Jeremiah,
Steward, South East**

“I had a very difficult time personally. I had very low levels of self-esteem and had been off sick several times with burnout, stress, anxiety and depression. I felt I needed to do something. I became an RCN rep because I’d been on the receiving end of what I felt was poor care, and the help I got then from the RCN was very positive. It made me think how many others might appreciate getting support from someone who’d been in similar shoes. Often people will say, ‘I know how you feel,’ but in reality they don’t. If you can say to someone, ‘I’ve been there too and I know how hard it is,’ then it’s very powerful.

“Becoming a rep has brought me different skills that have had a positive impact on my self-esteem. Before I became a rep, I wouldn’t have had the confidence to stand up in front of a room full of people and talk, not in a million years, but now I can. I set up a study day on the importance of self-care because I believed that as a

profession, we’d stopped looking after ourselves and each other and that bothered me. I was delighted with how well the day went and have had messages since from people attending, saying how different things are for them and how they’re making more time for themselves.

“I also feel able to challenge decisions, behaviours and practices that I think are unacceptable, without fearing recrimination. Before I would have accepted that things were just the way they were, but now I feel empowered to question.

“People look at me now and see someone who has grown. I’ve had people say ‘I want what you’ve got,’ and I want to help them. What do I have that I didn’t before? It’s called a voice. I feel like I have found a purpose again, and that has had a knock-on effect for me personally and also in my clinical role. I feel reinvigorated.”

**Carey Johnson,
Learning Rep, London**

“One of the things I really value about being a rep is using the skills you gain to be able to develop yourself personally, building your confidence. It’s the whole package. I feel I’ve been given the courage to speak up. Sometimes staff don’t want to engage because they are so busy or feel it won’t change anything. Getting out and speaking to members on every ward has made a difference, giving them the voice they need.”

**Dionne Daniel,
Learning Rep, London**

“As a manager, I thought hard about becoming an RCN Learning Rep before I did it. Sometimes there can be anxiety about senior managers taking on these roles. But I think it has made me a better manager.”

Courage, self-belief and confidence

Pride in making a difference

**Vicky Houghton,
Steward, Eastern**

“I’d heard that the Trust was taking away Christmas dinner for staff. I felt it was unacceptable to have to bring in our own food on Christmas Day, because there were no canteen facilities, so I persuaded the Trust to reinstate it. People do listen to you when you have the RCN behind you. At the beginning I felt cross this had happened, but by the end I felt proud that I’d been able to make a difference.”



Jayne Greenop

**Ali Upton,
Safety Rep, South East**

“We all start as members and then some of us become RCN reps. As reps, we become friends, and those friends grow into our own RCN family. When I’ve had personal difficulties, the support I’ve had from reps all over the country has been amazing. The training has helped me to sit back and listen much more and hear what people are saying, rather than simply voicing my own opinions. And that helps you to build relationships. People both inside and outside work have seen a real change in me, with some saying I have a sense of calm about me now.”

**Linda Rumbles,
Safety Rep, Scotland**

“Being an RCN rep gives me a real sense of belonging. We might be divided geographically across all four countries of the UK, but when we come together as a group, it reminds us of what we have in common.”

**Nasreen Rafiq,
Steward, West Midlands**

“People talk about the RCN family, friends and people who support you. It is exactly that for me, and I know who I can turn to for support.”

**Forging
friendships**

🔊 (rɪ'zɪliənt) *adj* **1** (of an object) capable of regaining its original shape or position after bending, stretching, or other deformation; elastic. **2** (of a person) recovering easily and quickly from illness, hardship, etc.

▶ **re'silience** or **re'siliency** *n*

▶ **re'siliently** *adv*

Resilient

Resilience

**Bev Baker,
Steward, West Midlands**

“Sometimes members’ stories can break your heart. You go on that journey with them. You need the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. I’ve had to find resilience and toughness to get towards solutions. As reps, we need to be able to bounce back from adversity. I’ve experienced adversity in my life and I know it’s not easy.”

**Jeremy Davies,
Learning Rep and Steward, Wales**

“I am a force for change. Being a rep got me moving and now, at a time of great uncertainty, I want to get others moving. We’re one of the few unions that is actually growing and I want to see us using that energy in the future. One of the quotes that means a lot to me is by Aneurin Bevan, who said: ‘We have been the dreamers, we have been the sufferers, now we are the builders.’”

**Marie Hooper,
Steward, East Midlands**

“When times are hard, my feelings of pride and empowerment become my motivation to move forwards. I take the opportunity to reflect on the positive sides of both being a steward and my clinical role, and that helps me to get through even on the darkest days. Empowerment is partly about me, but also how I’m able to support others to feel empowered – it’s a two-way street. I’m proud of being a nurse and part of the RCN, which is one big nursing family. I stand for the profession, to support other nurses to develop professionally and personally, and when things aren’t going smoothly.

Resilience is about how you get through and like everyone else, I have good and bad days. You need to be able to release the pressure sometimes and relax – my way is through music.

I also have amazing colleagues who are always ready with a cup of tea, a listening ear and their time. We draw on each other’s experiences. And I get brilliant support from my RCN regional officer, who is also my mentor. She’s always available, completely understands the role and we have a great relationship. All that support gets me through the tough times – without it, I would have struggled much more.

**Denise Crampsie,
Steward, West Midlands**

“I can remember from an early age, when I was being told I couldn’t do something because I was a girl or because I was disabled, thinking, ‘Who says? If I want to, I will.’ But I’ve also learnt over the years that to do what I want, I need to be empowered.

“Empowerment takes many forms. It might be about accepting help, learning to do something, educating myself, or even being courageous enough to accept that I can’t do something, without punishing myself about it. But it is truly about having the courage to believe in yourself and go out and get what you want, without allowing others to hold you back. This is a philosophy I’ve applied all my life and which I share freely with my members, encouraging them to fight for what is right, but accepting when they are wrong or need help.”

**Feeling
empowered**



(L) Carey Johnson and (R) Nasreen Rafiq

🔊 ('ɪnə, veɪt) *vb* **innovates**,
innovating, **innovated**, to invent
or begin to apply (methods, ideas,
etc.) [**C16**: from L *innovāre* to renew,
from IN-² + *novāre* to make new, from
novus new]

Innovate



Catherine Salter

**Catherine Salter,
Safety Rep, Wales**

“I love being an RCN Safety Rep. We put our heart and soul into our work and I think our members see it and feel the benefit too. It’s good for people to know what we do, including what happens behind the scenes. Becoming a rep has given me additional knowledge, skills and confidence to develop both professionally and personally. I get back as much as I give.”

**Nasreen Rafiq,
Steward, West Midlands**

“There are so many positives to this role and we need to share them to encourage people to come on board as reps. It’s hard work but it’s such a privilege to enter into the lives of members.”

**Yvonne Lewis,
Steward, Yorkshire and Humber**

“I feel that being an RCN rep is both an honour and a privilege. As nursing staff, we look after patients and see them when they’re at their most vulnerable, and I feel the same about the members. We meet them at their lowest and we get to know more about them and their family situation.”

Honour and privilege