



SPRING/SUMMER 2022  
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**CLINICAL**

Mouth care  
at end of life

**PEOPLE**

Jenny's supporting  
people living  
with cancer

**ADVICE**

How to make your  
money go further

**WELLBEING**

Tips for coping  
with anxious  
moments

# MY FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

MARK'S BECOME AN RCN REP TO HELP MAKE  
HIS WORKPLACE MORE INCLUSIVE

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## Story to tell?

If you've got a story to share, email [health.care@rcn.org.uk](mailto:health.care@rcn.org.uk). This issue of *RCN Health+Care* went to press on 16 March. Get the latest RCN advice and information: [rcn.org.uk](http://rcn.org.uk)

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## Stronger together

Reading about the positive role models in this magazine brings me hope, which is what many of us need right now. Jenny's work providing reassurance to people with cancer who may otherwise feel forgotten is a reminder of the incredibly important work nursing support workers do (p6).

Mark's passion for his RCN rep role and his determination to make a difference, by taking a "watch me do this" approach, is an inspiration to us all (p8). We've also got information on the RCN's latest campaigning work, advice on dealing with anxious moments, and the chance to win an iPad by telling us what you think of RCN magazines.

There's so much going on in the world right now, but nursing staff continue to face challenges head-on. It's not easy, so don't ever feel alone. The RCN is right by your side.

### Kevin Morley

Chair, RCN Nursing Support Workers Committee



We use the abbreviations HCA (health care assistant), and HCSW (health care support worker) throughout this magazine to cover all those in nursing support worker (NSW) roles. Nursing support worker is a term specifically used by the RCN to describe the committee representing HCAs, assistant practitioners, trainee nursing associates, nursing associates and HCSWs.

## Nicola's a winner at the RCN Nursing Awards

Peer support worker Nicola Treharne has been recognised for her work offering practical support to pregnant women and mothers struggling with their mental health.

Nicola, who's based in south Wales, ensures women and their families receive crucial one-to-one care in their homes. She also encourages families to seek support if they're struggling and helps people manage their anxieties and stress after the birth of a baby.

After winning the nursing support worker category of the RCN Nursing Awards, Nicola said: "I was absolutely thrilled to win the award and feel privileged to be doing the work I do."

Read about Nicola's work: [rcn.org.uk/nicola\\_story](https://rcn.org.uk/nicola_story)

### NURSING SUPPORT WORKERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Preparations for RCN Nursing Support Workers' Day on 23 November are already taking shape after last year's success when events took place across the UK to celebrate the vital contribution you make to nursing care. On the day **#NursingSupportWorkersDay** reached almost 10 million people and was the third top trending hashtag in the UK.



Our film reached thousands of people across social media, while members and MPs in the House of Commons showed their support by wearing Nursing Support Workers' Day badges. Members also downloaded posters and used our Instagram GIFs and filter to celebrate the day.

The day was introduced in 2020 and is now held annually.

Chair of the RCN Nursing Support Workers Committee Kevin Morley said: "Get this year's event in your calendar now. Nursing Support Workers' Day is a great opportunity to educate and inform people about the vital work we do." Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/nursingsupportworkersday](https://rcn.org.uk/nursingsupportworkersday)

## Thinking about career options?

The RCN careers resource is a great place to start if you want to explore different roles. It contains content specifically for nursing support workers to help them understand the development and career opportunities across health and social care. Visit: [rcn.org.uk/nswcareerpathways](https://rcn.org.uk/nswcareerpathways)

### First Steps

A new animation shows the benefits of using First Steps – the RCN's learning tool for health care assistants.

Sharing it with your colleagues is a great way for them to see the range of topics covered, including accountability and delegation, safeguarding vulnerable people and infection prevention and control. Learn more:

[rcn.org.uk/firststeps](https://rcn.org.uk/firststeps)



# RCN demands pay rise for NHS nursing staff of 5% above inflation

Ministers must rethink current pay plans or risk staff losses that erode safe care

## Years of pay cuts must end to protect nursing and patients

It's time for pay to not only match **inflation**, but go **5% above it**



We've set our UK pay position for 2022-23, demanding that nursing staff get a pay rise of 5% above Retail Price Index inflation, which was running at 7.5% when we submitted our evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB).

The PRB advises governments on Agenda for Change pay, terms and conditions and has been asked to make recommendations on pay for NHS staff in England, Northern Ireland and Wales this year.

The RCN will be directly negotiating NHS pay with the Scottish government, alongside other unions. The UK government recently indicated it would give NHS staff in England a pay award of 2-3% for 2022-23.

The amount set aside for NHS pay in Westminster determines the initial funding available in all parts of the UK. We believe this falls far short of what nursing staff

deserve and won't stop people leaving the profession.

Evan Keir, the Nursing Support Worker Member of RCN Council, said: "Only by paying staff fairly will enough people start and stay in nursing roles.

"Nursing staff play a vital role in patient safety. Despite this, nursing as a profession remains undervalued and understaffed. After years of underinvestment, the government must act urgently to protect patient care."

Our NHS pay demands mirror what we believe all nursing staff deserve, no matter what sector or setting they work in. Find out more and campaign with us: [rcn.org.uk/fairpay](https://rcn.org.uk/fairpay)



See page 16 for advice on how to feel in control of your finances.

# Being there for people living with cancer

Jenny provides reassurance to those who may otherwise feel forgotten

As soon as she started working on the urology outpatient department at the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, Jenny Chatfield knew her role as a cancer care navigator was right for her.

In partnership with clinical nurse specialists and specialist consultants, Jenny acts as an intermediary for patients and provides a high level of support to all urology cancer patients.

She works with a clinical nurse specialist to undertake remote holistic needs assessments (HNAs) and makes relevant onward referrals where required. She also supports new cancer care navigators within the trust.

Jenny contacts patients within two weeks of their diagnosis to offer immediate support. “Most of the time, patient anxiety stems from the waiting. Waiting for appointments, waiting for results – and not knowing what will happen next,” she says.

By bridging the gap between waiting times, she makes sure patients don't feel forgotten. As a result, her role also assists the wider team in supporting patients and their families.

Jenny provides practical advice by signposting patients to specific resources related to their diagnosis. These could be for support where their cancer diagnosis may affect their day-to-day lives. She also helps to connect them with cancer support groups.

And all this is communicated with compassion. “Patients mostly want practical information, not sympathy. I support them in an emotional and practical way, which can have a positive impact on their care and their life outside hospital,” Jenny explains.

“I speak from personal experience, having had family members who have been diagnosed with cancer. I'm not reading from a script, it's heartfelt, and I think the patients appreciate that.”

Jenny often goes beyond expectations for her patients, especially if they have additional needs she can help with. “I can make referrals to our welfare rights team too,” she says. “This ensures patients get relevant support and welfare advice, including the benefits they're entitled to.”

## Adapting to change

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on cancer services, but Jenny makes sure her patients are always kept informed. “A lot of patients don't know what's happening with their care, due to all kinds of delays. I listen to their concerns and tell them what they can expect,” Jenny explains.

For a period, all Jenny's contact with patients moved online, including holistic needs assessments. She says there were some advantages to this. “It saved a lot of people from coming back into the hospital, so they avoided the trip and the anxiety that can cause.



“

I'm not reading from a script, it's heartfelt

Jenny, picture courtesy of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

“I could ring patients at a time that suited them, and they could choose if they wanted their family members present. Moving online can give patients more input into their care.”

But not everything was ideal if the news was unwelcome. “Sometimes patients were prepared for the news and had their friends or family with them for the call. But not everyone can be in that situation. It's important to think about other challenges too. For example, people with hearing impairments or English not being a first language. We had to be prepared to find solutions.”

Jenny also has to protect her own wellbeing. “These conversations can be emotional and involve talking about upsetting

developments in patients' care, so I make sure I schedule no more than four of these calls a day,” she says.

### Providing reassurance

Despite the challenges, Jenny says her work is hugely rewarding. “When I ring patients, most of them are grateful to have someone check in on them. Some think that when they

leave hospital, everyone has moved on to the next patient. When they get that personal call from me it can make them feel a little bit more reassured.

“I might be talking to someone who's going through one of the worst experiences of their life. Being able to offer support at this time is important.”

*Words by Becky Gilroy*

### Find out more

Join the RCN Cancer and Breast Care Forum:  
[rcn.org.uk/cancer-and-breast-care-forum](https://rcn.org.uk/cancer-and-breast-care-forum)

Read the RCN subject guide on cancer care:  
[rcn.org.uk/cancer-care-guide](https://rcn.org.uk/cancer-care-guide)

Find out about Macmillan Cancer Support:  
[macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk)

Learn how to become a cancer care navigator:  
[rcn.org.uk/careers-resource-for-nsws](https://rcn.org.uk/careers-resource-for-nsws)

# 'Watch me do this'

Mark explains why he became an RCN rep and why he wants to see more nursing support workers take on the role

Mark, pictured by Aaron McCracken

With 30 years' experience of working in health care, Mark Barclay, a health care assistant in haematology, was determined not to let challenges in the workplace get the better of him.

When he applied for an internal role, Mark, a registered-blind person, found the application process was designed specifically for able-bodied people.

"Nothing worked for me from application through to clearance, and actually getting the job," he says.

He sought advice from his former union, but it was thought that he wouldn't win a case, so Mark decided

to represent himself. He submitted a formal complaint and won his case. Now the workplace recruitment process is more inclusive. The application now mentions that if any assistance is required, the HR team are happy to facilitate.

"I was left high and dry, but my attitude was 'watch me do this,'" Mark says. "At that point I wasn't even aware that health care assistants could join the RCN, but I have since joined and soon found myself needing support again."

### **Pandemic impact**

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Mark faced another

challenge. With personal protective equipment essential to his working life, he found that with his condition, he was unable to use the visors or goggles provided.

"My employer didn't know what to do with me, so they told me to shield," he explains. "I worked with my RCN rep and fought tooth and nail to get back to work. I was eventually successful."

This inspired Mark to start the journey to becoming an RCN rep. "I knew I could represent someone, as I had already represented myself," he says.

As Mark's rep training started during the pandemic, it was done differently to how it had



been done previously. Rather than in-person classes, learning and development was delivered using Microsoft Teams and self-directed learning. Mark says this method worked well for him.

“By working remotely and independently, I can go at my own pace, which I prefer,” he says.

After completing the foundation training, Mark focused on the RCN steward’s module, which covers everything from critiquing policy, to boundaries and member expectations.

“This was tough going but made sense to me as I’d been through the process of representing myself,” he says.

Mark has the support of his employer and works closely with

another rep on his ward. Now, having completed his training, he believes being a rep creates a vehicle for change.

“It’s good to be that voice for somebody who’s maybe not as outspoken as me. I know when and how to negotiate and when a negotiation perhaps needs more argument,” he says.

### A voice for change

It’s the warmth and compassion that so many nursing support workers have as character traits that Mark thinks can fuel the fire to become an RCN rep.

“It’s everyone’s job to protect each other, especially now, when health care is on its knees. And you can be part of this. We need constructive, powerful voices for change and to be able to affect that change. I’ve already seen how my one voice can help do this.”

He adds: “Imagine a choir of voices of nursing support workers and registered nurses, all coming together to create that universal message.”

Mark is concerned that pressure on the current workforce means there may be fewer nursing staff in the future and says that being a rep right now means that important issues such as fair pay and safe staffing can be heard by a greater number of people.

“There’s no incentive to work in health care at the moment,” he says. “We can provide beds, but there’s nobody to staff them so it’s more important than ever that we speak out.”

*Words by Bethan Rees*

“

**I fought tooth and nail to get back to work**

Find out more about becoming an RCN rep: [rcn.org.uk/becomearep](https://rcn.org.uk/becomearep)

Download *What is a Trade Union?* (publication code 009 727): [rcn.org.uk/publications](https://rcn.org.uk/publications)

# What do you think?

We've made significant changes to *RCN Health +Care* magazine over the past 12 months, relaunching it with a clearer sense of purpose, a new design and distinct sections. We're keen to know what you think and what more we could do to improve.

We're also interested to learn how much you value printed magazines, as we seek to reduce our impact on the environment and make best use of members' money.

We've launched a survey that takes just 10 minutes to complete.

**i** The quickest and easiest way to do this is online: [surveys.rcn.org.uk/s/mags-survey](https://surveys.rcn.org.uk/s/mags-survey)

If that's not possible, please complete the below survey, remove this page and send to Kim Scott, RCN Headquarters, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN. Your responses will be treated anonymously and will be deleted once analysis is complete.

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Age:	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54 <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 <input type="checkbox"/> 65+
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<p>How frequently do you think <i>RCN Health+Care</i> should be printed and posted?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a year  <input type="checkbox"/> Six times a year  <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly  <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Twice a year (the current frequency)  <input type="checkbox"/> Four times a year</p>
<p>What <i>RCN Health+Care</i> content sections do you find most valuable? (tick all that apply)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Update  <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion  <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical  <input type="checkbox"/> Advice  <input type="checkbox"/> People  <input type="checkbox"/> Wellbeing  <input type="checkbox"/> Career  <input type="checkbox"/> Action  <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):</p>
<p>How satisfied are you with the content in <i>RCN Health+Care</i>?</p>	<p>Please indicate your satisfaction level below:  Very dissatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very satisfied</p>
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<p>Which of the following would be attractive changes for <i>RCN Health+Care</i>? It is currently printed and posted to nursing support worker members twice a year.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Increased frequency  <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased frequency  <input type="checkbox"/> More pages  <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer pages  <input type="checkbox"/> Better paper quality  <input type="checkbox"/> It is made online only  <input type="checkbox"/> More adverts  <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer adverts  <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above  <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):</p>
<p>Does <i>RCN Health+Care</i> provide you with something you don't get elsewhere from the RCN?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes (please specify):  <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>Would you miss <i>RCN Health+Care</i> if it didn't exist in print?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

\*Please provide this if you would like to be entered into our prize draw to win an iPad. This information will only be used for the purposes of selecting and notifying the winner. See our privacy notice: [rcn.org.uk/privacy](https://rcn.org.uk/privacy). The prize draw entry closes on 29 May 2022.

# Preparing for revalidation

Revalidation is now a requirement for nursing associates in England. Find out what it involves and how to get ready



The first cohort of nursing associates are starting revalidation, a process that must be completed every three years to maintain their registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

Nursing associate Jamie Sutton has until the end of next year before he needs to revalidate, but he's getting everything ready early, and by getting organised now, he feels comfortable about what he needs to do.

"I attended a short workshop ran by our clinical education team when I first registered. They talked us through what was required to revalidate.

"I also did some online research, so I was clear about what was involved. I've got a folder which I put all my relevant information in.

"Although I'm still a way off needing to revalidate,



I've already got some reflections, records of my continuing professional development

hours, details about the in-house training courses I've attended, and some thank you cards I've received."

To improve his practice and care, Jamie makes a point of reflecting on positive and challenging workplace scenarios, documenting what happened while details are fresh in his mind.

While this is useful for those who have to revalidate, it's something all nursing staff can benefit from doing.

"I do this as I go along, but for revalidation purposes, I also think about what's in my folder every six months or so. This makes sure I'm not falling behind as there are many areas to cover.

"If, like me, you're revalidating for the first time in the next few years, get your evidence prepared early and if you're at all worried, seek advice from those who have done it before."



Be aware of the range of opportunities in health care

## Development is for everyone

### All nursing staff deserve to grow, says Louise

When nursing support workers (NSWs) get the development they need, this can lead to improvements to patient care and personal job satisfaction, which benefits the whole nursing team.

I developed a two-level workplace programme, designed for NSWs in my trust. It's part of the national health care support worker programme run by NHS England/Improvement. It's there to develop staff within their role but also inspire them to pursue a career as a registered professional if they wish to. I hope it will help NSWs recognise the enormous impact they make.

We focus on developing an individual's knowledge and understanding of what they're being asked to do. With the right support and development a lot of NSWs can do more, but are often only given the opportunity to learn from observing others. While this is important, it can be problematic if individuals aren't given an explanation of why something's being done, or if bad habits have crept in.

### Long-term planning

Sometimes I need to spend time speaking to managers to encourage them to release NSWs for the programme. I understand that taking valued members of the team away from short-staffed wards for study days is a big ask, but I encourage them to look at the longer-term benefits and how this could help future workforce planning.

Not only will this mean having an upskilled and more confident team, but as a trust we will attract and retain excellent staff who want to benefit from the training we provide. When we're short-staffed it's easy to pause staff development which ultimately has an impact on retention and could still leave us without our full team.

I know these new opportunities have helped the NSWs I work with because I can see their confidence has grown. They're also given introductions to contacts and experiences to help them on their career development path.

Speak out if you're not getting the learning and development you need and deserve. Talk to your line managers, your practice development leads and your RCN learning reps. All nursing staff deserve the chance to develop and grow.

You're talented, caring and skilled individuals who need to be aware of the range of opportunities there are in health care.

*Louise Simons is a practice development nurse for bands 1-4*



 Read our 10 top tips for revalidation:

[rcn.org.uk/nswrevalidation](https://rcn.org.uk/nswrevalidation)

Download *Your Essential Guide to NMC Revalidation* (publication code 009 321):

[rcn.org.uk/publications](https://rcn.org.uk/publications)

Take a look at our careers resources for NSWs: [rcn.org.uk/careers-resource-for-nsws](https://rcn.org.uk/careers-resource-for-nsws)

# Mouth care at the end of life: what you need to know

It's an essential component of holistic care, says Carolyn

Keeping a patient's mouth moist, clean and comfortable when they are nearing end of life is a vital part of care. Carolyn Doyle, RCN professional lead for end of life care, talks us through what you need to know.

## The basics

Mouth care should always be carried out if it can be tolerated by the person.

- Explain clearly what you're going to do.
- Be aware of any swallowing problems.
- If you need to leave dentures out of the mouth to improve mouth comfort, explain to the person being cared for and ask for consent to do this. Explain why you're doing this to family members too, as they may not have seen their relative without dentures.
- Encourage independence as much as possible, or support someone to participate in their own mouth care where they are able to.

- Support families and carers to provide mouth care if they wish to.
- When appropriate, encourage patients, residents and their relatives to bring in their own toothpaste, toothbrushes and products.
- Use a light source to look in the mouth. Without this, it's easy to miss areas of the mouth, particularly the roof of the mouth.

## The importance of cleaning

Help to keep the mouth moist and hydrated.

- Use a water-based lip balm as often as needed to keep the lips moist.
- Use a small headed soft bristled toothbrush.

“

Explain clearly what you're going to do



- A mild flavoured toothpaste or a non-foaming toothpaste may be better tolerated during end of life. A pea-sized amount or a smear is sufficient.
- If toothpaste can't be tolerated, use a small amount of water on a toothbrush to remove debris and plaque.
- Gently clean the teeth, cleanse the gums, cheeks, tongue and palate.
- If using a spray, ensure the water is not sprayed towards the back of the mouth. A referral should always be sought from a speech and language therapist to ensure the patient is not at risk of aspiration. This action can be carried out throughout the day and will help to keep the mouth moist and hydrated.
- You can also use a dry mouth gel.
- Ensure the person's dentures are removed and cleaned thoroughly twice daily.

**Assessment and documentation**

Record keeping is essential.

- Assess the mouth for any changes using a mouth care assessment form.
- Speak to a member of the clinical team if you note any changes or have any concerns. Make sure this is documented.

**i Checklist adapted from *Mouth Care Matters in End-of-Life Care***

**'It makes a difference'**

"I'd usually have an enabling role in supporting the person perform mouth care, but if patients can't carry out their own mouth care, for example, when they are reaching the end of their lives, I step in. It is a rewarding role and it makes a difference. It helps patients look and feel cared for.

"It's no longer unusual to have patients at the end of their lives on the respiratory ward where I work, as specialist end of life wards have been repurposed as COVID wards where the single, private rooms can be used for isolating patients.

"But even if patients can brush their own teeth, we often have to remind them to do that. There's so much going on for them while they are being cared for on our ward, it may not be their priority."

**Áine Doggett-Brookes, health care assistant**



**Find out more**

Download *Mouth Care Matters in End-of-Life Care* (publication code 009 921) and *Mouth Care at the End of Life* (publication code 006 991): [rcn.org.uk/publications](https://rcn.org.uk/publications)

View the Health Education England resource on mouth care at the end of life: [youtube.com/watch?v=6KB4UkZ-YVM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=6KB4UkZ-YVM)

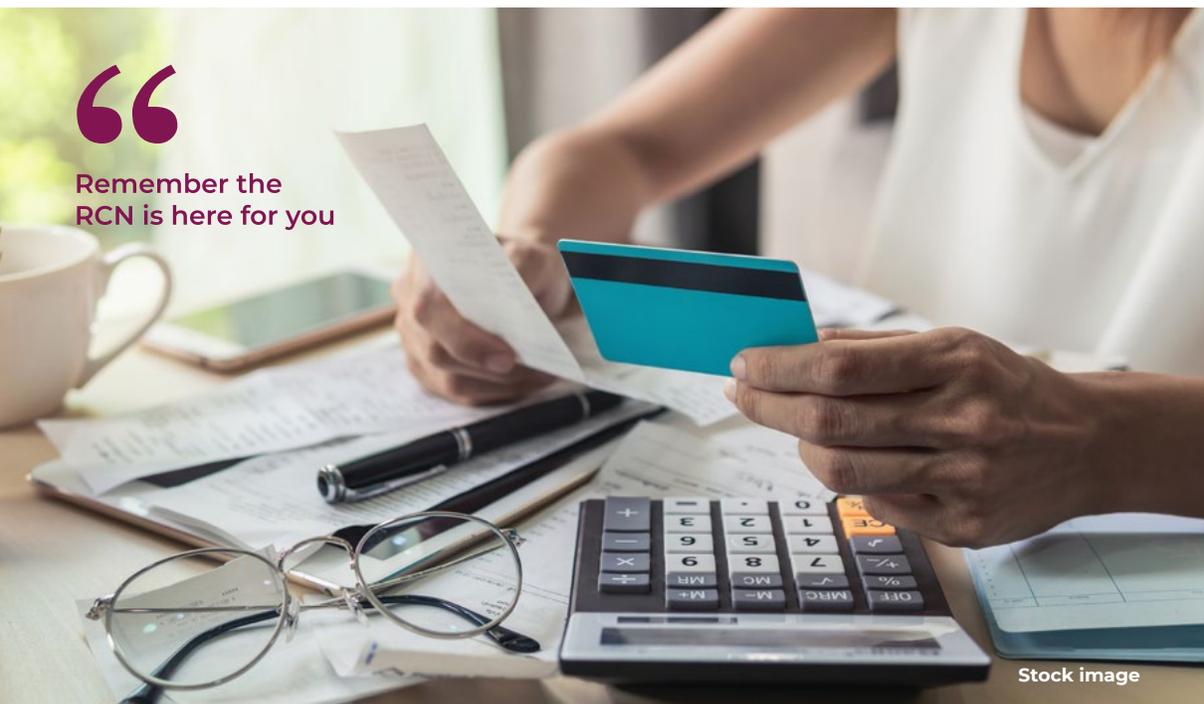
# How to feel in control of your finances

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Utilities, food, fuel and housing costs are soaring for many members, so here's some advice to help make your money go further

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Remember the  
RCN is here for you



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From next month, electricity and gas bills for a typical UK household will go up by nearly £700 a year, a 54% increase. These eye-wateringly high figures will have an impact on an estimated 18 million households.

Alongside this we're facing a rise in costs elsewhere, with fuel prices increasing and inflation having an impact on food prices, our mortgages or rental costs.

Maive Coley, Vice Chair of the RCN Nursing Support Workers Committee, is concerned. "After two years of working under the relentless pressure of a global pandemic, we need to make sure this isn't the final straw," she says.

The RCN can provide advice and help you find ways to manage if your finances are getting out of hand. We've teamed up with

MoneyHelper ([moneyhelper.org.uk](http://moneyhelper.org.uk)), previously the Money Advice Service, to offer a range of tools and tips for setting daily budgets and calculators to help you manage your increasingly stretched budgets.

Maive adds: "We know that the rising cost of living is having an impact on our members' spending and for some, this can be a worry.

Please seek support and don't feel alone in trying to manage any debt or money worries."

### Financial shock

As well as the increasing cost of essentials, sometimes people experience a financial shock that's triggered by something external. This could be a life event, like

redundancy, or a period of illness, which means a decrease in your income, or an increase in your spending.

RCN welfare adviser Ian King says there are many ways to seek support if you've had a change of circumstance.

"Our new webpages have easy tools and guides that can help, whether someone

needs benefit advice or just tips on how to spend less and ways to make their money go further," he says.

"With the RCN financial wellbeing checker, you can pinpoint exactly where you need support, and someone will be available to help."

Take a look at the RCN financial wellbeing advice: [rcn.org.uk/moneytroubles](https://rcn.org.uk/moneytroubles)

## 'It can be hard to accept you're the person who needs help'

*RCN member Helen\* developed a health condition which meant she's now unable to work*

You never know what's coming around the corner in life. I couldn't have predicted that my financial situation was going to become problematic. I was so used to being independent.

I contacted the RCN for advice on how to manage on a reduced income and how I should go about accessing additional financial assistance. I was advised to take a look at the financial wellbeing resources on the RCN website. There I found a wealth of information. The budget tools were especially helpful for really sorting out my income and outgoings.

Having used the information on the website, I then made an appointment to speak to one of the RCN's welfare team, who was brilliant.

Discussing my situation with them helped me rebuild my confidence, as I had felt so isolated.

As nursing staff we're used to looking after other people so it can be hard to accept you're the person who needs help.

But when that support came, it meant so much. I felt I wasn't alone – I had the RCN team on my side.

I feel fortunate that I was able to access help from the RCN. If you're worried about your finances, for whatever reason, remember the RCN is here for you.

Start off by looking at the information on the website as soon as you can. Even if you find it hard to take this small first step, do it, and take control.

*\*The member's name has been changed.*

The RCN is campaigning for a fair pay rise that takes into account the rising cost of living. See page 5.



You can also take a look at the *RCN Nursing Support Worker Money Guide*: [rcn.org.uk/nsw-money-guide](https://rcn.org.uk/nsw-money-guide) and find out how to apply for an RCN Foundation grant: [rcnfoundation.rcn.org.uk/apply-for-funding/hardship-grants](https://rcnfoundation.rcn.org.uk/apply-for-funding/hardship-grants)

# How to cope with anxious moments

RCN counsellor Sarah talks us through strategies to stop challenging times having a longer-term impact

I woke up last Friday in a great mood. The sun was shining, I had some lovely plans with the family on the weekend and I was feeling good. Just a few hours later, everything felt very different. An unexpected work request completely changed my outlook.

I knew this wasn't a life-altering moment but nevertheless my positivity

had gone, and I found myself feeling anxious.

It happens to us all. Everyone feels uneasy, worried or fearful at some point in their lives. If you feel anxious in job interviews, or when you're asked to do something new or difficult for the first time, that's completely understandable. But just because these moments are common, it doesn't necessarily make

them pleasant or any easier to deal with.

Try to take a step back and gain some perspective, keep an open mind and don't judge yourself too harshly. Taking positive action can help stop an anxious moment becoming something more problematic. Importantly, it can also help you recognise when you need help and prevent you from reaching crisis point.



Try to be kind to yourself

## Our top tips

### Be prepared

#### Choose behaviours that help you balance the effects of physical and emotional stress.

- Try to be kind to yourself. There are many things in the world that we just can't control, but we can work to gain influence over our reactions.
- Notice what you're doing and if your mind starts wandering, notice that too. Don't criticise yourself for it. You're human and that's what humans do.
- Notice the type of thoughts in your mind, rather than the specific ones. Name the types – are they memories, worries, past conversations or future plans?
- Practise self-care. Consider the factors that have an impact on your own health. This is a power we all hold as individuals to influence our level of wellbeing.
- Consider your physical health: make sure you exercise regularly, cut down on the amount of alcohol and caffeine you drink and, if you're a smoker, get help to stop.

### At the time

#### Help yourself remain calm by taking a mindful approach.

- Try to ground yourself in the moment by naming five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.

- Take three mindful breaths, focusing on how it feels when you breathe in and out deeply.
- Be aware of your body, how it feels and any movements you're making.
- Notice the emotions you're feeling. Pause to name them, without judging or criticising yourself.

### Afterwards

#### Take care of yourself, don't feel guilty and remember the RCN is on your side.

- Take time to reflect on what happened. Ask yourself if this is an isolated incident or if you need to consider seeking support elsewhere.
- Whatever you feel, try to acknowledge and let go of any guilt this might bring up for you.
- Seek extra help if you feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues.
- Take positive action. RCN members who are concerned about their level of self-care can talk to an RCN counsellor. Visit [rcn.org.uk/counselling](https://rcn.org.uk/counselling) for information on booking an appointment.
- You're not alone. Remember you can also discuss your health and wellbeing with your GP, friends, family or others you trust.



Find our *Healthy You* resources: [rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace](https://rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace)

## Seen our films?

Take a look at the RCN's mindfulness-based videos for nursing staff: [rcn.org.uk/time-and-space](https://rcn.org.uk/time-and-space). The films are sponsored by LV=.



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## Your RCN UK Nursing Support Workers Committee

### Representing you



**Dennis Greer**

Trade Union  
Committee Member



**Tracie Culpitt**

Professional Nursing  
Committee Member



**Evan Keir**

Nursing Support  
Worker Member  
of RCN Council

### Country and regional representatives



**Kevin Morley  
(Chair)**

Northern



**Maive Coley  
(Vice Chair)**

East Midlands



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Thiruthanikasalan**

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South West



**Alison  
James-Herbert**

Wales



**Ilva Jones**

West Midlands



**Katherine Davis**

Yorkshire &  
the Humber

### Here for you

The committee reports directly to RCN Council through its dedicated Nursing Support Worker Member of Council and provides a platform for HCAs, HCSWs, TNAs, NAs and APs to influence RCN policy at a UK and local level. Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/nswcommittee](https://rcn.org.uk/nswcommittee)  
Arrangements are being made to fill the vacant committee seats for Eastern, Northern Ireland and South East. Find the latest elections news: [rcn.org.uk/elections](https://rcn.org.uk/elections) and email [elections@rcn.org.uk](mailto:elections@rcn.org.uk) if you're interested in finding out more about these roles.

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