Dear Colleague

I am pleased to provide you with the following update.

**COVID-19 Update**

I am incredibly proud of the way RCN Wales representatives and staff have continued to provide services to members during the pandemic and would like to thank you all, I know how difficult it has been. A lot of representatives in Wales understandably wanted to return to clinical practice and, although we recognise the need to maintain as much facility time as possible, especially during the crisis, we were happy to support them.

I have held regular COVID-19 briefing meetings with the Board to keep them updated during the crisis. Council has also met every two weeks and the RCN has circulated a large amount of UK briefings; published a large amount of guidance for members and is working hard to ensure it is responding to members’ developing needs.

I and my team have been working hard to raise the issues that are important to you at the very highest level in Wales. RCN Wales has robustly raised concerns with regard to the lack of suitable PPE, the lack of testing for health and social care staff and the mitigation of risks around pregnancy and BAME workers. As a result of these efforts, RCN Wales has been invited to the Welsh Government PPE technical briefing meetings and receives statistics of PPE stock levels.

We also pushed for PPE to reach the social care sector and will continue to raise concerns on behalf of social care staff and residents. We are also calling for testing to be prioritised as we move out of lockdown.

Members had raised concern that the guidance issued by PHE had not been classified cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as an aerosol generation procedure (AGP). The RCN wrote jointly with the BMA to PHE and received a response that stated that these decisions are being made at individual health board level. I have been given assurance that all health boards in Wales have agreed that CPR is an AGP.
I expressed our disappointment to the Director General and the CNO with the lack of partnership working on the development of student guidance and the details of the deployment of students, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this representation both Welsh Government and HEIW have been working with us as students return to their studies.

On 14 May 2020, I gave oral evidence to Health and Social Care Committee on RCN Wales' experience of COVID-19. I now attend meetings of the Shadow Social Partnership Council, which previously had only been attended by members from the Trade Union Congress (TUC) Wales and TUC affiliated unions.

**Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016**

The Chief Nursing Officer had written to the Directors of Nursing in Wales stating that, during the pandemic, some business-as-usual processes and work-streams associated with the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 would need to be put on hold. I wrote to both the Health Minister and the CNO to remind them that compliance with the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 is a statutory requirement and was even more important during the crisis.

**Death in Service Benefits**

RCN Wales has lobbied the Welsh Government to extend Death in Service benefits to members and their families who have returned to practice. This has now been agreed and will provide families with £60,000, in addition to any other benefit/pension and in any service setting, however, it would not provide a survivor pension.

**Welsh NHS Partnership Forum**

Nicky Hughes, the recently appointed Associate Director of Nursing Employment Relations has been elected as the Vice Chair of the Welsh Partnership Forum. Nicky has attended weekly meetings of the Welsh Partnership Forum Business Committee with the Health Minister and I would like to congratulate Nicky on rising to the challenge of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis in her new role.

We have worked hard within the Welsh Partnership Forum to ensure that under Annex C of the 3-year pay deal, unsocial hours would revert to being paid in the first 3 months of sick pay. The NHS staff sickness absence targets had not been met but following a tremendous push from the RCN, a firm commitment
has been given from employers that these unsocial hours payments will be received after 6 weeks of absence. A further agreement had also been given that the money, that would have been spent on first 6 weeks, would be repurposed into supporting the NHS Wales Attendance Policy.

**Risk Reduction Framework for NHS Staff at risk of COVID-19 infection**

The Welsh Government has set up an expert panel to receive evidence around the risks to all vulnerable groups, including BAME staff. All unions are represented on this group, including the RCN. A toolkit has been created based on evidence from around the world regarding vulnerable people, including BAME, sickle cell for Black Afro-Caribbean, age, heart disease and diabetes and social deprivation. As a result, the BMI levels for the Asian community have been reduced. The expert group will continue to review the toolkit on a weekly basis in light of evidence from across the world and the feedback from staff on the ground.

The RCN has asked if the Welsh Government is planning to create a mental health risk assessment specific to COVID-19.

**Workforce Planning**

I have recently written to the Minister for Health and Social Services asking him to publish the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy for Wales and to issue a formal statement on how the annual education commissioning process will work after this year. RCN Wales has urged the Welsh Government to increase the commissioning numbers for pre-registration learning disability nursing; to increase post-registration education for community nursing and to commission more courses and develop nursing careers in the field of infection prevention and control.

**Professional Practice Team**

I am pleased to announce that Diane Powles has been appointed to the post of Associate Director of Nursing, Policy & Professional Practice. The Professional Practice Team has worked hard looking at critical care staffing levels; guidance on end of life in a virtual world and undertaking surveys to provide briefings for Members of the Senedd (MSs). The team has also worked with the Chief Nursing Officer’s office around student nurses and international nurses. We were delighted that one of the first RCN Prince of Wales Cadets was accepted to work in a field hospital in Wales.
*Return to the ‘New Normal’*

Although both North and South Wales offices remain closed to members, I want to assure you that services to members are continuing as usual. A skeleton staff has manned Ty Maeth two days per week for essential maintenance work and building security.

The team is currently working up a plan on what a return to work looks like and discussions with GMB and UK safety leads are ongoing. This is in keeping with COVID-19 guidance issued by RCN HQ and the guidance set by the Welsh Government.

**RCN UK Pay Update**

A lot of work had been done in relation to NHS staff’s terms and conditions as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on overtime payments and sick pay for staff who are self-isolating to ensure they are not penalised in their sick records etc.

There was a joint union call for UK NHS pay round 2021/2022 to be brought forward on the 3 July. The Board will receive any further updates at the September Board meeting.

**RCN Safe and Effective Staffing Levels Campaign**

Work is ongoing for the influencing campaign for the Senedd elections in May 2021, which will be launched in September 2020. Unfortunately, a number of political influencing and member engagements events have had to be rescheduled due to the pandemic.

RCN Wales has been commenting on government policy around the impact and quality of patient outcomes and is contributing to a large amount of UK projects that are ongoing e.g. professional guidance workstream around safe staffing, work on UK principles, UK reporting mechanisms and the RCN President’s oral history campaign.

The 3-year review of health board reports on safe staffing should provide further information on the impact of the legislation on aspects of care, staff retention and sickness levels.

Keep up to date with the RCN Wales Safe Staffing campaign at: [https://www.rcn.org.uk/wales/get-involved/safe-staffing](https://www.rcn.org.uk/wales/get-involved/safe-staffing)
**Political Influencing**

The impact of COVID-19 as delayed the introduction of the Social Partnership legislative Bill but RCN Wales has contributed to the consultation process and the Board will be updated in September.

We had a significant victory in terms of Health and Social Care Quality and Engagement (Wales) Bill as the Welsh Government conceded they would consult with the RCN on this. On 3 June 2020, the Bill received Royal Assent and now becomes The Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020. Further information can be found via [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2020/1/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2020/1/contents/enacted)

RCN Wales has signed a joint statement with Welsh Government and numerous stakeholders from across different industries on the needs of Wales in respect of the new immigration legislation that the UK is putting forward. RCN Wales has contributed to the Migration Advisory Committee’s (MAC) consultation on the new immigration regulations, which it is was conducting on behalf of the UK Government.

At the Welsh Conservative Party conference on 7 March, we were able to influence around extending the nursing apprenticeship role, the importance of degree and widening access. The Board Chair also discussed the Shared Prosperity Fund with the Home Secretary.

RCN Wales continues to engage with all political parties ahead of the 2021 Senedd election.

**Congress and the AGM**

As a result of the pandemic, the RCN did not hold Congress in June and RCN Council has confirmed that the RCN Annual General Meeting will take place virtually on 6 August 2020.

Council discussed the feedback from the consultation on the timings of future AGMs and as the majority of responses, including that of the RCN Wales Board, had supported holding the AGM in the same week as RCN Congress, Council agreed that from 2021 onwards, the AGM would continue to be held during Congress Week.

The Agenda Committee met in July and selected a number of the debates and events from the 2020 Congress programme which will take place online
throughout the rest of the year. Further information is available on the RCN website: [https://www.rcn.org.uk/congress](https://www.rcn.org.uk/congress)

**RCN Wales Board Elections**

The RCN Wales Board elections will open on Friday 10 July 2020. The timetable for the elections is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominations open</td>
<td>10 July 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominations close</td>
<td>4 September 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates’ details published</td>
<td>8 October 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates notified if uncontested</td>
<td>By 12 October 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting opens</td>
<td>29 October 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voting closes</td>
<td>26 November 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidates notified and results published</td>
<td>By 30 November 2020</td>
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I would urge you to encourage members to stand in these elections.

Further information will be available from 10 July on the website:


**RCN Wales Nurse of the Year Awards**

In light of the pandemic, the Board reluctantly agreed to cancel the RCN Wales Nurse of the Year Awards 2020. The Board was extremely disappointed that it would not be possible to hold this prestigious event in the 2020 International Year of the Nurse and Midwife but agreed to explore what could realistically be done in 2020 to celebrate nurses and nursing in Wales.

**President Addresses RCN Wales Board**

Professor Anne Marie Rafferty joined the Board meeting virtually and offered her support for the Board. The President assured the Board that Council is striving to ensure all countries within the UK are listened to within a UK organisation.
Student Recruitment

In this current climate, we are looking to recruit student members virtually via the university learning platforms. We are also continuing to utilise social media to advertise and promote student recruitment and the benefits of joining the RCN as a student nurse, utilising Facebooks adverts, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, stories and videos. Going forward we will also engage with universities as to how we can offer alternative learning and development for 2nd and 3rd year students. If branch members want to share their story of being an RCN student member to support our student recruitment activity please can they contact Tracy Lenzy and her team on CommunicationsWales@rcn.org.uk

Welcome to New Staff

I am delighted to inform you of the following staff changes at RCN Wales:

− Diane Powles has been appointed as Associate Director of Nursing, Policy and Professional Practice.

− Following John Chapple’s retirement, Derek Browne has been promoted to Senior Officer and Helen Chittock had been appointed as an Officer based in the North Wales office.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your continued support and would urge you to encourage members to provide feedback / intelligence to the RCN during the pandemic.

Kind regards

Helen Whyley
Director, RCN Wales