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Quote of the month

“The Government can no longer afford to simply ‘nudge’ those people who consistently drink at dangerous and harmful levels”

RCN England Director Tom Sandford on Britain’s binge-drinking culture.

Helping prepare for death and bereavement

The RCN is supporting a Scottish alliance that aims to create openness in discussions about dying.

Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief plans to raise public awareness of ways of dealing with death, dying and bereavement by preparing people for the experiences of death, supporting communities and preparing health care staff for death-related discussions.

First contact number for RCN regions

From 5 March, all calls to the Eastern and Yorkshire & The Humber regions will go to RCN Direct, which is the first point of contact for members’ queries and cases. RCN Direct advisers offer a wealth of information, and refer callers to local members of staff where necessary. If members have an ongoing case, they can continue to call the direct-dial number of the regional staff member who is supporting them.

Call local rate 0345 772 6100 to contact the Eastern and Yorkshire & The Humber regions.

Congress agenda

The agenda for Congress 2012 can now be read on the RCN website. Emergency agenda items can be submitted right up to the close of Congress.

Downbanding condemned

The RCN has condemned a London trust for suggesting that band 4 health care assistant (HCA) positions would be suitable alternative employment for qualified band 5 nurses.

Nurses working at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust contacted the RCN after receiving letters saying they could be employed as HCAs to avoid redundancy.

The RCN said it would “flatly reject” proposals to drop band 5 nurses to band 4, and would take action to protect the banding of registered nurses. RCN London region was awaiting the consultation results, due late in February.

RCNXtra: holiday savings for members

RCN members can save 10 per cent on package holidays from a range of travel companies thanks to a new service from RCNXtra.

Travellers Advantage also offers a 12 per cent discount on more than 60,000 hotels and a 15 per cent saving on car hire. Terms and conditions apply.
PM must act on alcohol crisis

The Government has pledged to introduce new measures to combat alcohol misuse, but the RCN remains firm on the need for minimum pricing.

The RCN has welcomed a commitment by the Prime Minister to tackle the nation’s damaging relationship with alcohol. Following intense lobbying by the RCN and others, David Cameron announced that he would introduce more measures to tackle the “scandal” of alcohol abuse.

Mr Cameron conceded that heavy discounting of alcohol by supermarkets is fuelling Britain’s binge-drinking culture, but fell short of committing to price regulation.

“We have been calling for minimum pricing for some time,” said Tom Sandford, Director of the RCN in England, when he was interviewed by ITV. “We genuinely believe that ‘pocket money prices’ play a significant role in increasing the levels of alcohol consumption in some groups.”

“Robust regulation on the sale of alcohol, along with sensible minimum pricing, is now desperately needed in order to meaningfully reduce the health damage caused by harmful drinking.”

The Government will publish its alcohol strategy for England later this year.

Sexual health resource made public

The RCN’s online training resource Sexual Health for Non-experts is now available to the public as well as members. The resource, in the RCN Learning Zone, has easy-to-understand information on issues relating to older people, young people, men, women, those with different sexual preferences and people with learning disabilities.

While sexual and reproductive health are issues that nursing staff in all areas of practice should feel confident in addressing, they are also relevant to the wider public.

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/sexualhealthfornonexperts

Pensions vote: read latest online

RCN Council was due to discuss the results of the College’s pensions vote as this issue of RCN Bulletin was published.

Members across the country have been voting on whether the RCN should accept the Government’s “final offer” on proposed reforms to NHS pensions.

Find out the latest news on the RCN’s next steps in relation to pensions at www.rcn.org.uk

£2.7bn

Estimated cost to the NHS in England of alcohol abuse

Robust regulation on the sale of alcohol is now desperately needed

£2.7bn

Estimated cost to the NHS in England of alcohol abuse
RCN fears chronic nurse shortages

Scotland sees lowest student intake in 15 years

The RCN has warned of chronic nurse shortages across the UK after more cuts to student places were announced.

The Scottish Government has revealed plans to reduce the number of students starting a nursing or midwifery degree by 10 per cent in 2012-13. That figure was not agreed with the RCN and follows a 12 per cent cut this academic year. It means the total nursing and midwifery student intake numbers in Scotland will be the lowest in 15 years.

RCN Scotland Director Theresa Fyffe said: “Year-on-year cuts like this are not sustainable. Last year we agreed, reluctantly, to a 12 per cent cut in numbers, but all the evidence we have gathered shows that this further reduction risks there not being enough professionally qualified nurses graduating to meet the demand for health services in the future. This cut will be bad for patient care. It’s not a question of supply exceeding demand leading to graduate unemployment; health boards are cutting nursing posts simply to balance their books, ignoring increasing pressures on our health services.”

Last month NHS London announced that more than 400 places on adult nursing courses will be axed and reports suggest similar cuts are being proposed elsewhere.

A Nursing Standard investigation found that NHS North West intends to reduce nurse training places by 16 per cent by 2014-15, and NHS South East Coast plans to cut nursing and midwifery training commissions by more than six per cent next academic year.

The pattern is spreading. It has been reported that NHS North East plans to cut over three per cent of its student nurse intake and NHS South West will cut five per cent.

RCN Chief Executive Dr Peter Carter said the reductions, which amount to thousands of training places, are “seriously worrying”.

“The nursing workforce has grown in recent years, but only just enough to keep up with rising demands in health care,” he said. “It is vital to avoid a return to the chronic nurse shortages of 20 years ago and the old boom-and-bust cycle of NHS workforce planning.”

RCN backs calls for clearer social care system

A requirement should be placed on clinical commissioning groups and English councils to commission social care services together, a new report has said.

The RCN backed the report, by the parliamentary Health Committee, saying it was a “logical starting point” in simplifying the system, addressing gaps and preventing duplication of services for patients and users.

The committee also said there should be a single framework covering older people’s health, care and housing services locally – in some areas, those responsibilities are split between the NHS, a county council, and a district/borough council. The MPs said the single framework would play a “significant part” in helping to achieve savings in the NHS.

Committee members and the RCN both called on the Government to accept the recommendations of the Dilnot report, which recommended caps on what patients and service users should be expected to pay for their social care.

The Government will explain its approach in England and Wales in a forthcoming White Paper. Services in Northern Ireland are fully integrated. In Scotland, the RCN is consulting members and will publish a health and social care integration principles paper ahead of a Scottish Government consultation paper due in May.

RCN Chief Executive Dr Peter Carter highlighted how discharged patients are increasingly returning to hospital as services are affected by funding cuts in adult social care.

He said: “Getting social care funding right is crucial not only for the future of the social care system but the NHS, too.

“It is nursing staff and the NHS who deal with the pressures of delayed transfers between hospital and community settings on a daily basis, increasing restrictions on services and confusion over who pays for what.”

He also said the “key issue” remains the underfunding of social care by cash-strapped councils.

NHS and councils should commission together

£1.2bn

MPs’ estimate of possible social care funding gap by 2014
Criticism of health bill continues to grow

The RCN’s announcement that it was opposing the beleaguered Health and Social Care Bill added to pressure on the Government over its proposed reforms to the NHS in England.

Since the College’s announcement in January, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of GPs and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy have joined the RCN in opposition.

The organisations’ position was backed by editorials in the Financial Times, Health Service Journal, Nursing Times and the British Medical Journal, which all criticised the reforms.

The bill will legally abolish the current system of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts, create clinical commissioning groups and open the NHS to increased competition from the private sector. More than 1,000 amendments have been tabled in parliament since the bill was first heard, and members of the House of Lords have now voted against the proposals.

Laurence Meehan, the RCN’s Senior Parliamentary Officer, said: “The RCN’s decision to oppose the bill came at a crucial time, with other health care organisations following our lead.

“The pressure is really on the Government now, in a rapidly changing situation over the bill.”

The RCN decided to oppose the bill, believing the balance between competition and quality had become skewed, and following the rejection of amendments covering mandatory safe staffing levels and the regulation of health care assistants.

Opposition to reforms mounts

Parliamentary roundup

Welsh politicians hear RCN concerns

The RCN hosted an event at the Houses of Parliament to highlight pressures on the health frontline in Wales.

Welsh MPs and Lords heard from Christine Thomas, Chair of the RCN Wales Board, and RCN Wales Director Tina Donnelly.

They highlighted statistics from the RCN Wales employment survey, called The Fragile Frontline, which showed how further NHS cuts will only impact on patient care.

Christine, pictured with Huw Irranca-Davies, MP for Ogmore, said: “It was an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the goodwill that the nursing family provides on a daily basis to ensure patients receive good care, even when staffing levels are lower than we would advise.

“It was also an opportunity to share some of the innovative ideas that staff across the country have identified to improve care while also achieving financial savings.”

Be healthier, be active

RCN supports Olympic campaign

The RCN has backed an Olympic-inspired campaign to encourage over-55s with long-term conditions to get active.

Your Personal Best highlights how keeping active can make a significant difference to health and wellbeing, and could ease symptoms.

The RCN was among 10 patient and health care professional groups that backed Your Personal Best.

Steve Jamieson, Head of the RCN’s Nursing Department, said: “We know that the number of people with long-term conditions is rising, and could put added pressure on health services. So it is important to encourage them to be as active as possible.”

The campaign’s ambassadors, Strictly Come Dancing stars Len Goodman and Arlene Phillips, launched the campaign at the Olympic Park. It is backed by GlaxoSmithKline and NHS London.

Find out more at www.yourpersonalbestcampaign.co.uk
Training must tackle poor dementia awareness

I refer to Victoria Barak’s letter (“Specialty undermined by dementia job adverts”, February), regarding RGNs working as lead nurses for people with dementia.

Dementia does not sit solely under the umbrella of mental health. It gives rise to cognitive and physical impairments, as well as behavioural changes, which may differ in each individual. As an RGN who has worked with dementia sufferers for 20 years, I believe RGNs and RMNs have much to offer each other and to this client group.

Nurse training needs to tackle the poor knowledge-base underpinning many nurses’ understanding of dementia and its consequences for sufferers and their families. Dementia is increasingly a co-morbidity within all health care settings, and must be addressed alongside any other medical, surgical or mental health needs.

Jo Waring RGN, dementia research nurse, by email

RMNs: ‘no clinical skills’?

I agree with Victoria Barak. As an RMN with extensive experience of dementia care in the care homes sector, I was interviewed for a job with a large company only to be told that RMNs have no clinical skills, and asked whether I would be able to identify a grade-three pressure sore or would I “leave it to the RGN”. With the media push to improve dementia care, I don’t see many advertisements for RMNs to work in this field. As Victoria points out, what is the point of training RMNs in specialist dementia care when the onus falls on adult nurses to deliver it?

Mark Marsh RMN, by email

Test results should come with caveat

I appreciated the article on the importance of early bowel cancer detection (“Embarrassment or bowel cancer?”, February) as I work on the endoscopy unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead, one of the trusts at the forefront of the National Bowel Screening Programme.

However, I did feel that the article implied that, while sigmoidoscopies can be performed by nurses, the same does not apply to colonoscopies.

Our nurse endoscopist performed colonoscopies, both diagnostic and therapeutic, for several years before her recent retirement, and our unit manager and two other colleagues who are currently training as nurse endoscopists, will carry out both colonoscopies and sigmoidoscopies.

While sigmoidoscopy is certainly quicker and less uncomfortable than colonoscopy, and is very useful in the detection of left colon lesions, it obviously cannot detect the 30 per cent of cancers that occur beyond its reach. I would argue that the reassurance of a “clean bill of health” from a sigmoidoscopy comes with the significant caveat “so far, so good”!

Amanda King, by email

Letters and emails

Over the last few months, thousands of members have been helping to shape the new RCN website.

They have taken part in local focus groups, phone interviews and online surveys, providing insight into their experiences with the current website, and explaining the range of services they want to see online. The information gathered has had a major influence on the finalised design of the new website.

Members told us that they wanted to see a website that more closely related to them as individuals. Key to the design, therefore, is personalisation, allowing users to filter content based on their specialism or location. Interaction is another key theme and members will be able to leave comments on specific pages and make use of social media interactions, such as the Facebook “like” button.

The new site will launch in the summer but, before that, members will be working with the RCN Digital Communications team to help test the new resource and to ensure that the final product addresses the issues identified in the earlier review period.

Leon Hughes
RCN Digital Communications Manager on the new RCN website

bulletin@rcn.org.uk

Feedback
A momentous event

Congress is coming, and with it a chance to debate, network and influence

If the past few weeks have shown us anything, it is that the nursing profession is facing some genuinely difficult challenges. From the drive to make cuts in health budgets across the UK to the constant threats to your employment rights – this is one of the toughest periods that many in nursing can remember.

Nowhere is the voice of nursing more important than our Congress, which this year returns to Harrogate. Our annual meeting allows us all to come together, debate important subjects, network with one another and share ideas and information. Crucially, Congress gives you the chance to shape the agenda of your organisation; the decisions made on the Congress floor genuinely do impact on the direction that the RCN takes in the year ahead.

In recent years, we’ve seen some truly momentous and interesting events take place at Congress, from speeches by prime ministers to visits from influential individuals like Michael Parkinson, Andrea Rippon and, last year, Alastair Campbell.

If you have never been to Congress before, I would encourage you to make 2012 your first time. There simply isn’t a more significant event in the nursing calendar and given the issues that currently face us, it has never been more crucial to come together and speak as one.

We are strongest when we are united; I hope you can join us in Harrogate for what promises to be an exciting, interesting and important week.

Dr Peter Carter
RCN Chief Executive

The view from here

Gemma Selby
Student member of RCN Council

I knew I was going to be a nurse from the age of 10 when my mum was diagnosed with cancer. I was in awe of the nurses who helped her, even as her battle came to an end. Her death spurred me on to start nurse training and I enrolled just after she passed away. But I was running away. Things eventually caught up with me and I dropped out.

I worked for five years in international marketing but nursing always called me. I’m now a third-year nursing student and know I’ve made the right choice.

I’ve always been keen to represent fellow nursing students, so it was an obvious decision to get involved with the RCN as a student information officer. Serving on RCN Council seemed the logical next step. It’s a steep learning curve but worth every minute. I feel privileged to be in a position where I can help shape decisions about what the RCN does to support the profession.

Sarah Wiles

Tweet of the month

www.twitter.com/thercn

30th year in nursing today. Dickie knees, very little hair, but still enjoying role in the NHS. @Author_man_ram

Monthly poll

Have your say on the issues of the day

This month

Work Your Proper Hours Day fell on 24 February. Did you work any unpaid hours in February?

Vote yes or no at www.rcn.org.uk/bulletin

Last month

Do you feel your employer does enough to protect your safety at work?

Yes 36% No 64%

Online

What you’ve been discussing...

Facebook
www.facebook.com/royalcollegeofnursing

I have so much praise for my local [RCN] rep - can’t thank this man enough for his sympathetic emails and continuous ideas and support. He has made RCN membership so worthwhile.

Sarah Wiles

RCN Discussion Zone
www.rcn.org.uk/dz

If nursing courses were based in hospital trusts, and tendered out to universities for academic input and accreditation, then there would be a far better sense of identity for students, and clinical tutors would be around on the wards to teach skills in situ. Who knows, they could also teach and refresh current ward staff.

Paul Dalpra

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Paul Dalpra
‘A superb agenda’

The nursing event of the year takes place from 13-17 May. Find out why you should be part of RCN Congress

Fifteen resolutions and 10 matters for discussion have been agreed for this year’s RCN Congress.

Topics covered range from ensuring mandatory training takes place in work time, to whether careers will still exist for older nurses to work safely, and whether the RCN should affiliate to the Trades Union Congress.

Chair of Congress Rod Thomson says it was more challenging than ever for the Agenda Committee to decide what made the shortlist, after one of the highest numbers of proposed agenda items in recent years.

He says: “I think we have a superb agenda this year, looking at some of the most important issues affecting nursing staff.

“I believe this year’s Congress is coming at a pivotal time for nursing, and I’m looking forward to some challenging and stimulating debates as we help shape health care for future generations.”

Live tissue donation

One of the items on the agenda asks RCN Council to lobby against any moves to change the law to enable payment for live tissue donation. It was submitted by the RCN Greater Glasgow branch after nursing student Anthony McGeown read about the issue.

He says: “I was reading articles in newspapers and on the BBC website and felt this was something that needed more thought from the nursing perspective and I thought the place for that was Congress.”

Anthony, who is in his third year at Glasgow Caledonian University and an RCN student information officer, attended special Congress meetings organised by the branch to help him pull the proposal together.

He says: “The branch felt it was something out of the ordinary and something that could stimulate a good debate, which is why we put it forward.”

Anthony attended Congress for the first time last year, and spoke in support of one of his branch’s resolutions. He is now preparing to propose the motion on live tissue donation in Harrogate.

Also on the agenda

Other items on this year’s agenda include a debate about the long-term future of general hospitals, submitted by the Cambridgeshire branch. The RCN Students Committee will lead a discussion about whether pre-registration nurse education is fit for purpose, and the UK Safety Representatives Committee will propose that Council urges employers to do more to reduce the recognised harmful effects of shift working on staff and patients. The Public Health Forum will be asking members to vote on whether the RCN should lobby the Government to regulate the marketing and sale of health screening products and services.

Details of the agenda, and how to submit emergency items, can be found at www.rcn.org.uk/congress

Elsewhere at Congress

There is a wide-ranging and packed programme of Events at Congress – formerly known as the fringe – which includes something for nursing staff from all specialties.

Outside the debates, there are speeches from key RCN members and staff, as well as from some inspiring special guests.

And don’t forget the largest nursing exhibition in the UK. The free event features everything nursing staff need to keep up to date in their practice.

Members do not have to attend the whole event – you can come for one day and still take part in the debates and activities. As Congress and its events are RCN accredited, attendance counts towards continuing professional development and Prep requirements.
Students, and HCAs and APs

This year there are also new-look events for students, and health care assistants (HCAs) and assistant practitioners (APs). Rather than having a dedicated day, tailored activities will be held from Monday to Wednesday, so members can attend on the day most convenient to them.

After an introduction, students, and HCAs and APs will be able to attend the debates in the main hall and hear the keynote speaker in the morning, before a programme of seminars after lunch.

Not attending?

The Congress pages of the RCN website will be updated before and during Congress week. All debates will be streamed live on the website and available for viewing afterwards. There will be updates on the RCN’s Twitter page at www.twitter.com/thercn and a daily Congress email update.

What’s happened since Liverpool 2011?

RCN Council committees have been working on 2011 agenda items and a full report will be available at this year’s Congress.

For example, the Cambridgeshire branch, in the RCN’s Eastern region, submitted a resolution last year that called on Council to promote awareness of the impact and effect of hate crime.

As a result, new online resources will be launched later this year to assist nursing staff when treating patients who they suspect are hate-crime victims, or who are victims themselves.

The resources will cover how to encourage patients to report the alleged crime formally, or how to report incidents anonymously to a voluntary organisation for information rather than investigation – which is known as third-party reporting.

Third-party reporting empowers the organisation to report targeted violence and hostility. Third-party reporting organisations are often charities and will pass anonymous information to the police.

The most important thing is that the incident is reported because the police have more information about what is happening and where. It means they can react with their resources and in partnership with schools and other community organisations.

If any members have experienced hate crime and are willing to share their experience with others, email diversity.team@rcn.org.uk

Get updates on other Congress agenda items from last year at www.rcn.org.uk/congress2011

Have your say at Congress 2012

RCN Congress and Exhibition 2012 is being held from 13-17 May. To book a free place, for more details and to see the full agenda, visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress

Members who “like” the RCN on Facebook can receive updates before and during Congress. There is also the chance to say you’re attending and interact with other delegates.

For more, visit www.facebook.com/royalcollegeofnursing

In my in-tray

Rachel Hollis
Lead Nurse
Children’s Cancer, Leeds

Yorkshire is God’s own county, so we are delighted to welcome colleagues back to Congress in Harrogate. It is a good opportunity for us to showcase the Yorkshire scenery and hospitality, with lots of local nursing staff acting as ambassadors for the RCN and the area.

I am proposing a resolution from the Children and Young People’s Specialist Care Forum asking Council to oppose service redesign that results in the loss or fragmentation of specialist knowledge, expertise or staff.

We are concerned that at times of major service reorganisation, children’s services do not receive a high enough priority. Specialist services for children have received scant attention in the Health and Social Care Bill.

I am looking forward to the debate, hearing from members from different areas, and giving people the opportunity to raise concerns about their specialist area.

www.rcn.org.uk/congress
A credit to cancer care

Treatment for cancer can be as cruel as the condition itself. Sally Cooper speaks to a member who is transforming patient care and, with the help of the RCN, spreading the word about innovations in radiotherapy nursing.

“Sometimes nursing is not just about making people better,” says radiotherapy nurse Ellen Trueman, an RCN member committed to making sure all patients, no matter what their prognosis, have the best treatment experience they can.

“With cancer, life turns around on diagnosis. For some there is no second chance. Whatever path they are on, whether it is to recovery or not, you have to strive to do your very best. Nurses can have a huge impact on what patients and their friends and families remember.”

A private space

Ellen is keen to champion the field of radiotherapy nursing, and one of her biggest achievements has been to set up the Radiotherapy Assessment Supportive Care Lounge at St James’s Cancer Unit in Leeds, known to her team as RASC(a)L.

Ellen recognised that a large number of her patients have very specific and intensive care needs, often related to their illness or treatment, such as pain management or complicated feeding methods. Having seen how many patients were failing to carry out their personal care needs because of time spent travelling to and from treatment or waiting in public areas, she asked if a private space could be created for rest and feeding without patients needing to take up a bed on a ward.

The suggestion led to the creation of the new unit, which is a special four-bed rest area for outpatients undergoing radiotherapy treatment. In this room they can feed themselves, lie down or take medication, while maintaining privacy and dignity. In the long term, the lounge should save the trust money as it will help to reduce admissions while promoting better self-care.

Spreading the news

As part of her commitment to promoting radiotherapy nursing, Ellen has also initiated and run a major RCN-accredited radiotherapy nursing conference at St James’s for the last three years. Having RCN accreditation from the outset has enabled her to attract prestigious speakers and pharmaceutical industry attendees, something she feels is of paramount importance.

“Radiotherapy nursing is just coming into its own and our event enables clinicians, industry representatives and nurses to come together to find better ways of working and of ensuring maximum patient comfort,” Ellen says.

RCN accreditation

Accreditation is the primary means by which organisations and individuals assure and improve quality. The purpose of RCN accreditation is to ensure that learning and development resources are valid and worthy of public recognition, are able to guide individuals and organisations in the health care decisions they make, and are capable of informing best practice and continuous improvement.

Linda McBride, RCN Learning and Development Manager, says: “The RCN accredits a wide range of events and resources that contribute to the learning and development of nursing and the wider health care family. RCN accreditation ensures that a product or resource has been rigorously assessed and meets the RCN’s quality standards.”

The RCN accreditation unit now offers a self-assessment service where individuals and organisations can obtain initial feedback on how their application meets the accreditation standards and seek support in developing a product or resource for accreditation.

For further information, go to www.rcn.org.uk/accreditation or call 0207 647 3647.
Working intelligently

RCN Direct is ready to respond to members’ queries, no matter how local or specific the concern. April Brown reports

The RCN has set up a local intelligence system to ensure that wherever you are based in the UK, you will get the advice and support you need when you first make contact with the RCN.

Terina Scheeres, RCN Direct Contact Centre Manager, says that information from RCN regions in England and the three other UK countries can arrive in a number of ways. “Although we may hear about a situation for the first time when a member telephones us or when we read local reports, we would then contact the local office for more information. More typically, though, RCN Direct now receives local intelligence straight from the regional and country offices. They either email us a form or leave a voicemail on our dedicated 24-hour hotline.”

The knowledge is used to ensure that advisers at RCN Direct know what to tell members. “We can give them important details and a comprehensive background to the situation. Where necessary, we will still refer the case to the local office,” Terina explains.

This allows staff at RCN Direct to stay ahead of the game. “We are able to reassure members that we are aware of what they are facing and provide specialist advice and guidance on their particular issue. The local intelligence is constantly reviewed and updated as circumstances change.”

Sian Morris, an adviser at RCN Direct, says she has used the reports on several occasions and the impact has been noticeable. “Callers can feel a situation is out of control and often start by saying, ‘I’m sure you’re aware of the circumstances within my trust’. Now we are able to tell a member that we do know what’s going on and give them details of the process to be followed. This inspires confidence in the RCN.”

What information is gathered?

The local intelligence form contains full details of the situation, including the employer, the site, the number of staff affected and contact details for the regional lead officer, patch administrator and the local steward. The report also contains any relevant documentation such as individual redundancy guides or consultation papers. The process is used when an issue affects a trust or a large number of RCN members.

How the system helps members

When it was announced that staff at Kettering General Hospital were being balloted about taking a reduction in their annual leave entitlement to prevent redundancies, the RCN was quick to respond. Within 20 minutes, staff at RCN Direct were notified that the regional office was aware of the situation, who the lead steward was, and the RCN stance on the issue. Advisers could immediately tell members who telephoned that the RCN was opposed to the ballot and they should not co-operate. Staff could also signpost members to the RCN website, which was updated with the latest information.

RCN Direct online

RCN Direct Online gives members the opportunity to search for advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The guidance is constantly updated and includes crucial information on issues such as breach of contract as well as a film explaining what to do if your employer wants to change your terms and conditions.

www.rcn.org.uk/direct
Sustaining a healthy environment

The RCN is supporting activities throughout March to raise awareness of sustainable health services. Kim Bell looks at an example of best practice.

Concerns about climate change might not often determine decisions about patient care, but a team of nursing staff in the south west has proved that wards can become more efficient while catering better for the needs of patients.

Three years ago, Simeon Edwards, an RCN member and manager of the renal unit at Royal Cornwall Hospital, decided to push ahead with a plan that would improve patient experience and see the department reducing its carbon footprint by four per cent while avoiding costs of more than £57,000.

"It’s been a real team effort," says Simeon. "The credit for success must go to all the staff and our patients. With support from the Renal Association, the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare and the British Journal of Renal Medicine, we are now inspiring a network of renal units across the country."

Putting the plan in action

As the NHS carbon footprint is concerned mainly with procurement, energy and travel waste issues, the team focused their efforts on small changes that would have a big impact on financial and physical waste in these areas.

They began by looking at the unit’s use of pharmaceuticals and medical disposables. "We established better operational efficiency and productivity by negotiating and managing the supply chain of drugs and equipment," says Simeon. "By doing this, we reduced the frequency of deliveries, cut packaging and selected more environmentally friendly products and distributors."

Smaller procurement initiatives, such as reducing linen dependency and eliminating food waste, were driven by patients and junior nurses. Linen requirements were reduced by 70 per cent and food waste was eliminated by redesigning a new sandwich menu and ordering specific daily quantities.

Pursuing improved outcomes

Encouraged by this success, the team then tackled aborted ambulance bookings, which were the cause of poor patient experiences because of inadequate planning. By improving communication with the ambulance service and streamlining patient activities, the cost of cancelled journeys was reduced overnight from £1,500 a month to just £400. The cost has now been completely eliminated and the improvement for patients has been considerable.

Simeon says: “From my perspective, as a charge nurse in the NHS, financial and environmental sustainability is about responsibly owning your own area, maintaining a budget and setting clinical standards to ensure quality care is delivered to improve outcomes and prevent deteriorating health. ‘Greener health care’ or the ‘climate change agenda’ is terminology that may either confuse nurses or turn them away from the real issue – which is providing sustainable health care.

"When high quality care is delivered, hospital-acquired infections decrease, patient incidents, falls and readmissions are less and, in conjunction with innovations such as self-care and telemedicine, a more sustainable NHS is formed."

Find out more and get involved

Climate Week: 12-18 March
www.climateweek.com

NHS Sustainability Day: 28 March
www.nhssustainabilityday.co.uk

The RCN has worked with the NHS Sustainable Development Unit to create a guide of what nursing professionals can do to improve health, save money and reduce carbon pollution. Find out what you can achieve today at http://tiny.cc/13ey5

Have you implemented changes that help reduce waste and save money where you work? The RCN is still seeking examples of innovation as part of its Frontline First campaign. Go to www.rcn.org.uk/frontlinefirst
**FORUM FOCUS**

**HIGHLIGHTING THE WORK OF THE RCN’S SPECIALIST FORUMS AND NETWORKS**

**Food and water help fight infection**

RCN guidance highlights the crucial role nutrition and hydration play in protecting against infection.

In an attempt to raise awareness of the strong link between malnutrition and risk of infection, *Essential Practice for Infection Prevention and Control* has been relaunched and updated by the RCN Infection Prevention Network to include a section dedicated to nutrition and hydration. The publication also highlights other core elements of good infection prevention and control practice.

Member Liz Evans, who is also Chair of the National Nurses Nutrition Group, is responsible for the new section. She said: “The fundamental message is that malnourished people have a higher chance of infection.”

“It has been reported that the average stay in hospital for a well-nourished patient is six days. The average stay for a malnourished patient is 16 days. It is absolutely vital we get this right,” she added.

Despite general awareness of the effects of malnutrition, Liz questions how many people appreciate the positive impact that proper nutrition and hydration can have on infection prevention.

“In my trust we incorporate nutrition care planning in a checklist, which is commenced if a patient develops loose stools. If we do not screen patients, if we do not plan nutritional care, then we are putting them at higher risk of infection.”

“Added to this is the cost,” Liz said. “Reports suggest malnutrition costs the NHS £13 billion. Making sure our patients are properly nourished can reduce infections and so reduce cost.”

“This is highly important guidance – infection control is everyone’s business. All nursing staff should be fully informed.”

**Counting the cost of continence**

An all-party parliamentary group report on continence care will offer timely advice on commissioning over the coming months.

*Cost-effective Commissioning for Continence Care* explores ways to deliver a quality integrated service that meets the needs of patients, while allowing for cost savings.

RCN Continence Forum member Liz Bonner was one of a team of continence care professionals asked to be involved in the report’s commissioning group.

“It offers invaluable guidance during a time of great change within the NHS,” said Liz. “The wider cost implications of withholding quality continence care are significant because incontinence can have such a negative impact on a person’s life.”

With the NHS in England being called on to make an unprecedented £20 billion of efficiency savings by 2014–15 as part of the so-called “Nicholson challenge”, the report shows that quality of care is improved and NHS resources are used more efficiently through commissioning integrated continence services.

Liz described the document, which covers adult and paediatric care, as a one-stop shop for nursing staff to develop a business plan and influence commissioning.

“This report is empowering for nursing staff, raising the bar when it comes to commissioning in an area of health care affecting people of all ages,” she said. “It will help those uncertain about the challenges ahead by providing a framework for implementing and monitoring a fully integrated continence service that will benefit patient care.”

Steve Miles, Continence Forum Chair, added: “Rarely does a document come along from such a reputable source, at just the right time, to meet such an urgent need.”

“When the finer details of GP commissioning become clearer, it will enable us to make sure continence services are not left on the periphery.”

“**This report is empowering for nursing staff**

The document is available at www.appgcontinence.org.uk

Counting the cost of continence
Congress launch for learning disability film

The Learning Disability (LD) Nursing Forum committee met recently with a film company to start work on developing a short learning disability nursing production, due to be launched at RCN Congress. RCN Deputy President Cecilia Anim joined the forum in the planning.

Annie Norman, RCN LD Nursing Adviser, said: “This filming will be essential to the branch of learning disability nursing. We have seen a serious decline in LD nursing numbers over the years and we really need to illustrate how important their skills are. I hope this film will generate a great deal of positive interest from commissioners, academic institutions and service providers as well as health care support workers and students.”

School nursing position paper

A new RCN UK-wide position statement on school nursing has been launched this month. Produced with input from the School Nurse Network, part of the CYP Staying Healthy Forum, the paper recognises the crucial role school nurses play in supporting children, young people and their families.

Forum member Joy Winks said: “The school nurse role is often misunderstood and this paper highlights what a specialist role it is. An increasing body of evidence highlights the significant contribution school nurses can make in breaking intergenerational cycles to make for healthier lifestyles.

“This is an extremely timely document that can be used to influence policy makers and commissioners.”

Touring Pakistan

Zeba Arif, Deputy Chair of the Forensic Nursing Forum, is currently in Pakistan as part of a six-week lecture tour where she will be involved in numerous workshops and seminars. She is being hosted by regional directors of nursing and NGOs as President of the All Pakistan Nurses Association (UK) and will be looking at different types of nursing in Pakistan including women’s mental health and thalassemia. Zeba returns on 10 March.

Training in Zambia

CYP Acute Care Forum member Jason Gray has recently returned from Zambia where he was assisting with the delivery of advanced paediatric life support (APLS) training for doctors and nursing staff. The training was to equip medical staff from Lusaka with the skills necessary to provide APLS courses to their colleagues in an effort to ensure longevity of future paediatric resuscitation training in Zambia.

Mental health consultations

The RCN is looking for members of the Mental Health and Forensic Nursing forums keen to have their say on consultation documents from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) work programme, of which the RCN is a stakeholder. Past topics include self-harm, depression and alcohol dependence. If you are interested, contact caroline.rapu@rcn.org.uk

Members are also asked to contribute to a consultation on low-secure and psychiatric intensive care services and how they are commissioned. Email ian.hulatt@rcn.org.uk by 15 March.

More information at www.rcn.org.uk/mhconsultation
**Weighty issues**

*London, 14 March*

**Let’s Talk About Weight**

A conference in London this month, hosted jointly by the RCN and the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO), offers delegates an opportunity to learn how to approach the sensitive issue of weight management and obesity with patients.

The event, at the Charles Darwin House Conference Centre, will include a mixture of plenary and workshop sessions. The keynote speakers will focus on techniques and options available to manage and treat obesity, while the workshops will tackle practical issues, such as how to start a dialogue with patients about weight, and motivate them to change their behaviour.

Among the speakers are Professor Philip James, IASO President, Dr Peter Carter, RCN Chief Executive, and Dr Clare Grace, Obesity Research Dietician at King’s College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

The fee for RCN members is £120.

Email louise.walczak@rcn.org.uk or telephone 020 7647 3579 for further information, or go to www.rcn.org.uk/events

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**Old age, new solutions**

*Manchester, 20 March*

**Older People's Nursing: Current Challenges and Future Potentials**

This RCN conference will address and offer solutions to current challenges in older people's health and social care.

Delegates will be able to find out more about innovative practice, including evidence-based nursing, strategies to address emerging agendas and new approaches to workforce planning.

The conference is suitable for practitioners at all levels working in all settings, including acute services, community care and care homes.

More details at www.rcn.org.uk/events

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**Acting on equality**

*Nottingham, 18 April*

**Access to Acute: Get it Right for People with a Learning Disability**

An RCN event for people who can make a real difference to care and strategies within general hospitals.

The RCN wants to work with members to ensure continuing improvements for people with learning disabilities. Find out about good practice, how you can make reasonable adjustments a part of your local trust strategies, and how you can apply these principles to meet Equality Act duties for all vulnerable groups.

Email louise.walczak@rcn.org.uk or telephone 020 7647 3579, or find out more at www.rcn.org.uk/events
Join thousands of health care professionals to debate, network, develop professionally and share excellent nursing practice at RCN Congress: the UK’s biggest nursing event from the UK’s largest nursing union and professional body.

You don’t have to be an RCN member to attend* and places at the event are free!

By attending Congress you will be able to:

- hear inspirational conference speakers and debate the issues that matter to you
- discuss topical issues so you can expand your knowledge and update your skills
- explore the largest annual nursing exhibition in the UK and take part in the Health and Wellbeing programme
- discover the latest trends and hear the latest news about health care and nursing
- network with individuals from around the UK and enjoy evening entertainment.

New for Congress 2012!

RCN Congress 2012 now offers a range of programmes dedicated to Health Care Assistants and Assistant Practitioners, and Nursing Students, repeated over three days (14 – 16 May).

The HCAs and APs at Congress and Students at Congress series of events will provide invaluable developmental opportunities, discussions on a range of areas that matter to you and a chance to network with likeminded individuals from across the UK.

RCN Congress and Exhibition 2012 is accredited, so attending can help you to meet your PREP and CPD requirements.

For more information visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress2012

Places are limited so please book early to avoid disappointment

*Only RCN members are permitted to vote or attend the main debates in the hall.

There are two easy ways to book your FREE place at this event:

- register online or download a booking form at www.rcn.org.uk/congress2012
- call the Events Registration team on 029 2054 6460

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