Welcome to your new look newsletter

My name is Vivienne, I am a work injured nurse and have been involved with the Work Injured Nurses Group (WING) since 1995. Some members will remember me as a peer, a WING representative and the outgoing Chair of WING when the committee was dissolved in 2009.

Looking forward

I would like to welcome you to this newsletter, designed for work injured and disabled members of the RCN. Holly Chadd from the RCN’s Member Support Services (MSS) explains more about the changes on page five. I hope we will be able to use this new opportunity to continue the necessary and beneficial work of WING and the new Disabled Nurses’ Network (DNN).

While there have been reservations about changing the title of WING, if it is to work in tandem with the DNN then I believe the time has come to explore a new name for the amalgamating groups. It should be a name that will encompass the unique and invaluable work which we hope to undertake. I have suggested that we ask you as members to suggest a new and fitting name. So please take time and put your thinking caps on. Suggestions can be sent to Holly using the contact details on page five.

Difficult times

We are living in difficult times at present, and life’s difficulties are often magnified for our members. This can be due to the complexities of dealing with ill health, reduced or loss of earnings, a lack of redeployment opportunities, being unable to enter the profession – the list is endless.

CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO
Whatever our new group is called, we will continue to assist and support all members through information, factsheets, the helpline, the matching service and often most importantly peer support.

Wherever it is possible the RCN will assist staff with health restrictions to find alternative employment. However, members may have to think outside the box and consider working in areas which may not be their choice. Many of us are sceptical of change, but the fact is there are not many areas within nursing that are not mentally and physically demanding.

No doubt many members have been and will be affected by the changes to welfare benefits, with the current migration of those on incapacity benefit to employment support allowance to name just one. This is an extremely stressful time for members, so please use our experts in RCN MSS. We would encourage you to read the relevant factsheets on the RCN website, prior to contacting the helpline. Often what you need to know is in a factsheet, and this allows the helpline to take more complex calls. I am, however, very aware that not everyone has access to the internet, in which case you can call and ask for advice and for specific factsheets to be sent out to you.

Opportunities are not currently available now for staff of any age! Although well intentioned, I felt his comments were a little naive.

It was nice to see many WING members at Congress, and I can only apologise if I did not have the opportunity to speak with you.

I went with some poorly charged batteries, and returned with them well and truly drained. However, I did manage a quick coffee with Nicola Lee and it was good to catch up. Nicola, who was the WING staff lead, is now working for the RCN’s Employment Relations Department. While she is no longer directly involved with WING, by the nature of Nicola’s work it does encompass issues which our members face.

Congress next year is being held in Liverpool, and it would be great if we could hold an event for members of our group.

Keep in touch

I am happy for members, wherever they live, to make contact with me. My details can be found below this article. If sending an email, please indicate in the subject box that it is WING related (until we have our new name) – so as I can open the email and not delete it as spam. If telephoning, please bear in mind I might not be able to take your call – but please leave a message and I will return your call. If you are calling from a mobile, please could you call me back.

The WING and DNN service is run to meet your needs, not ours. Therefore it is important that you keep in touch and let us know how we can help. Obviously there is a limit to the support that can be given, and it is a sad fact that on many occasions what we want is not available in the current times of austerity.

Please do remember that we are here to support you and would ask you to let us know how we can do that. Members’ stories, both positive and negative, can help others, so please do get in touch so we can succeed in supporting each other.

Very best wishes

Vivienne
Email: viv_ferris@yahoo.com
Telephone: 028 9336 8000
Changes to welfare benefits

The controversial Welfare Reform Bill received royal assent in March. Ian King, Advice and Information Officer from RCN Welfare Rights and Guidance, highlights some of the most significant changes already in place and others due in the next year.

### Universal Credit

One of the key parts of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 is the provision to introduce a new welfare benefit called Universal Credit. Universal Credit will be introduced in October next year and will replace current means-tested benefits and tax credits for people of working age. The reforms also include introducing a £500 per week household benefit cap.

### Employment Support Allowance

One of the most significant changes is time-limiting the entitlement of contribution-based Employment Support Allowance (ESA) to 12 months for claimants in the Work Related Activity Group. As a result, those who have income (including that of a partner), an occupational pension and/or capital will be affected and could lose their entitlement to benefit.

In an equality impact assessment, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) said the policy would affect about 700,000 people by 2015-16, with about 280,000 of them losing their ESA.

The DWP estimates suggest that people who are disabled and have reached the 12 month limit will lose an average £32 per week for men, and £43 for women.

This change also affects claimants who are waiting for appeals to be heard.

- If you are appealing a decision that said you are fit for work, your contribution-based ESA will be subject to time limiting.
- If you are appealing against a decision which placed you in the Work Related Activity Group, you will also be subject to time limiting.
- If your appeal is successful, you will be paid arrears for the period when you were appealing – this includes any time when you were not receiving contribution-based employment and support allowance because it was time-limited.

- If you move into the support group following your appeal, your employment and support allowance will not be time-limited. This means the time you spent appealing, and the assessment phase immediately beforehand, will not count towards 12 month time-limit if you move out of the support group in the future.

- Claimants being transferred from incapacity benefit to contribution-based ESA start their 12-month entitlement period at the point of successful migration onto ESA. Claimants placed in the support group remain entitled to receive contribution-based ESA.

- If a claimant loses an appeal, as with current arrangements, they will not be required to pay back any benefits. If they win and are transferred on to income-related ESA then the same means-testing rules apply.

- People may still be entitled to a reduced amount of ESA following a successful appeal as the amount of ESA they will receive is greater than the assessment phase rate, so even after deducting income they may retain entitlement to some ESA.
Another controversial reform is the replacement of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) which will be replaced with the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This applies only to adult claims – DLA for children will continue for the time being.

A DWP impact assessment suggests that half a million fewer people will receive PLP by 2016 than would have received DLA. The report also claims that reform of DLA will cost £710 million to implement, while overall costs will be reduced by £2.24bn by 2015-16.

PIP will have only two rates of payment in each component – which are based on limited or severely limited ability for daily living activity and/or mobilising activity.

However, PIP will have many similarities with DLA. There will be two components: a daily living component (which has similarities to the current care component) and a mobility component.

Despite the similarities to DLA, the RCN believes the main intention behind PIP is to save money.

Worryingly, PIP will use ESA-style ‘objective’ assessment to determine eligibility – draft criteria has been under consultation – which greatly mirrors the point-scoring assessment model used for ESA. So it is a stricter test and RCN expects that some DLA claimants will be told they do not fulfil the conditions to receive PIP.

To claim PIP you must:
- be age 16-64 (or below pensionable age, whichever is the higher)
- satisfy the daily living and/or mobility activities test for three months prior to claiming and be likely to continue to satisfy the test for at least nine months after claiming
- pass the residence and presence test
- pass the habitual residence test.

Other PIP requirements:
- you will not be able to claim PIP when you reach 65 but you will be able to stay on PIP if you claimed or received it before the age cut-off
- you can receive PIP whether you are in or out of work
- if you are currently receiving DLA and you are between the ages of 16 and 64 you will be tested under the new benefit rules and conditions for PIP between April 2013 and 2016
- depending on a claimant’s circumstances you may get a short award of up to two years or a longer award lasting up to five or 10 years. If you are given a longer award you may still be contacted to see if your needs have changed.

Proposed timetable for delivery:
- April 2013 – an initial pilot of a few thousand new PIP claims
- June 2013 – all new claims will be for PIP
- autumn 2013 – if you are on working age DLA and you report a change in your condition, or your award is due to be renewed, you will be reassessed under PIP. A few thousand randomly-selected cases will be reassessed
- early 2014 – full reassessment as part of a randomly-selected rolling schedule.

It is intended that all existing DLA claimants will have been given the opportunity to claim PIP by March 2016.
An exciting opportunity

Holly Chadd, Information and Project Co-ordinator, RCN Member Support Services

Since joining RCN Member Support Services, one of my main duties has been to oversee the existing peer support groups and expand and improve them.

In April I sent a letter or email to all existing Work Injured Nurses Group (WING) and Disabled Nurses Network (DNN) members outlining changes to the service. However, please allow me to reiterate some key points here.

WING and the DNN are amalgamating under a new title. The group will build on the good work of WING, matching members so you can share knowledge, experience and friendship.

I have enjoyed talking to some of you and even meeting a few of you in person at Congress. I would like to reassure you that I am here to assist you to improve the service, rather than remove it.

Can all members who wish to remain in the group and have not already contacted me please drop me an email, letter or phone call just to say that you wish to continue membership. I will then send a peer support consent form to you to gather information on the issues you particularly want to talk about with your matches and the improvements you would like to see.

An exciting opportunity

This is an exciting opportunity to positively shape the group and make it work better for you, the members. I feel strongly about the existence of the peer support service and am dedicated to doing whatever I can to assist you in realising your expectations for the group. I am also very lucky to have Vivienne’s input as an experienced member and former chair of WING, and am very grateful to her for taking on the role of Editor of this newsletter. I’m sure you will also feel that you are well represented by Vivienne.

Vivienne and I are committed to taking the group forward and I hope that you will join us.

Best wishes

Holly
Email: holly.chadd@rcn.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7647 3881
Post: Holly Chadd, Royal Collect of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN

Money advice

The impact of welfare reforms on your weekly income, added to the rising costs of essentials such as utilities and petrol, can make it hard to not feel the squeeze on personal finances.

The RCN has worked closely with the Money Advice Service to produce a website that will help you plan your finances. The website gives advice on tax, insurance and sensible borrowing practices as well as offering financial planning advice for the future.

Visit the website at www.mmoym.org.uk

The RCN Welfare Service also offers advice and guidance on how changes to welfare benefits may impact on you and your family. There is also as a money advice service to help when your finances feel out of your control and assist you with dealing with creditors if you are struggling to make contractual payments.
Local updates

London

The RCN London region’s support group meetings for the rest of the year will take place on:

19 September – where Holly Chadd will meet members to learn about the work of the group and see how she can assist members in improving the peer support service; and

21 November – the annual general meeting.

The London region group continues to be very supportive and a RCN regional officer usually attends in case the group needs assistance. At the June meeting regional officer Stephen Awosunle gave a talk on bullying in the workplace.

The meetings are held at the regional office, which is on the ninth floor, 236 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8HL. They take place from 12 midday to 4pm, and a buffet lunch is provided. All members interested in attending the meetings are welcome, for more details call Zoe Jammeh at the regional office on 020 7841 3331 or the Chair Nancy Dovey on 01494 524541.

There will be a study day at the RCN, 17 Windsor Avenue, Belfast, on Monday 12 November from 10am–4pm. Due to limited numbers, places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Please let Vivienne know if you wish to attend before 5 November (contact details on page two).

Reinstating local groups

The continued success of the London and Northern Ireland groups is due to the dedication of their organisers and commitment from attendees. Poor attendance has been the reason for many other groups ending. However, this is sometimes coupled with key group figures moving away or being unable to continue their work for personal reasons such as ill health.

Many of your responses so far have indicated an interest in local face-to-face meetings. Where there is significant interest in a geographical area, the RCN will put you in touch with each other and help to establish a group. Please let Holly Chadd know if you would be interested in a local group and what you would like it to achieve (contact details on page six).

Also, please get in touch with Holly if you are involved in local activity which is not reflected in the newsletter – it would be great to hear about it.

Northern Ireland

Apologies to members in Northern Ireland that there has not been a support group meeting this year. Vivienne Ferris normally organises them but has been unable to due to personal and family illness.