Equal pay for work of equal value
New unsocial hours agreement ensures fairer pay

The RCN is pleased to report that there is now a new NHS agreement on unsocial hours working (USH). The new agreement replaces the ‘interim arrangements’ that were in place from October 2004.

USH was a key piece of outstanding business of the Agenda for Change agreement and the RCN welcomes the fact that this is now resolved. The negotiation was complex, difficult and time-consuming due to the multiple arrangements that had developed in the Whitley system over many years. In the end the discussions delivered a positive outcome and one which members have signed up to because both the trade unions and employers worked as a genuine partnership – sharing information and designing solutions together.

For the first time, people working in the NHS and doing jobs of equal value will receive the same USH payment – ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

For nursing staff, the new arrangements are slightly different from the previous existing arrangements. The differences are important and benefit RCN members – health care assistants have a more generous formula; nurses in bands 7 and above will benefit from having the cap at the top of band 6 removed; and everyone will benefit from the ‘50 per cent rule’ which means that if 50 per cent of the shift you work is in unsocial hours, you receive unsocial hours payments for the lot.

Rates for nurses and health care assistants have not reduced; however, for some NHS staff their rate of USH payment will reduce and they will gradually move to the new rate between April 2008 and April 2011. Likewise where rates have increased there will be a transition to the new rates over the same timescale.

For more information, see www.rcn.org.uk/support

Latest on pay 2008

As we reported in last month’s Activate, the RCN and the other NHS trade unions have had a number of meetings with the management side representatives to explore the possibility of a multi-year agreement on NHS pay.

This was prompted by the Prime Minister’s announcement at the beginning of January that the Government would be seeking multi-year pay deals across the public sector and the announcement of the teachers’ pay award for England and Wales – an increase of 7.05 per cent over the next three years.

(continued on page 2)

Also in this month’s issue:

- Book your place at Congress today
- NHS Pension Review: an update
- RCN responds to MNC
- Celebrating 10 years of RCN Direct
Due to the timing of the NHS Review Body process, any deal would have to have been agreed in principle at least by the end of January. While no formal offer was made to the trade unions, mutual exploration of expectations revealed a mismatch between the parties’ positions that could not be closed in the tight timescale.

The employers asked if the trade unions would still be prepared to make a joint representation to the Review Body asking them to recommend a multi-year deal. The RCN’s view is that we have already submitted detailed evidence to the Review Body based on a one year award. We have however, agreed to keep the channels of communication open and to meet again after the Review Body has made its report with a view to exploring whether a multi-year deal would be possible on the basis of the Review Body’s recommendation for 2008 being year one of a two or three year deal.

We understand that the Review Body will report to the Government by the 20 March. However, given that this is just before the Easter break, it is unlikely that there will be any announcement until sometime in April.

We are developing some briefing documents for activists to consider possible responses that the RCN could make depending on the level of the pay award and how the Government responds. These will help you to facilitate a discussion with other members. These, and all the latest information on pay, are available from www.rcn.org.uk/pay2008

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**Book your place today**

With Congress 2008 just a month away, the final preparations are now starting to come together, but there is still time to book your place.

Visit the Congress website to find background information on this year’s agenda items and progress reports on the 2007 items. You will also be able to get involved early by taking part in the online polls for the resolutions, and having your say in the dedicated discussion area on the website.

You will also find a day-by-day guide to the professional events and seminars, which includes sessions on the latest clinical and employment relations issues. And we are pleased to announce that environmentalist Jonathon Porritt will be giving the John Goodlad Memorial Lecture, and the Mary Seacole lecture will be presented by diversity champion and entrepreneur, Neslynn Watson-Druée.

Take a look at the latest information, submit emergency resolutions, and book online at www.rcn.org.uk/congress

*Congress 2008 takes place between 27 April and 1 May in the Bournemouth International Centre.*

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...and order your Congress posters too!

Help us promote Congress to members by putting up posters in your workplace. To obtain a printed copy, please contact your local regional or national office, or you can request an electronic version by emailing gemma.england@rcn.org.uk
Lord Darzi to speak at the RCN

As part of the NHS Next Steps Review, the RCN is holding an engagement event on 1 April.

Lord Darzi will give a keynote address and listen to the views of members and activists who have been involved nationally and locally, and those of invited allied health professionals. The event is well-timed to have an informed debate about the issues that are emerging from the review. The discussion will focus on four key themes: workforce, primary care, quality improvement and clinical leadership.

On 6 May Lord Darzi will report to the Prime Minister on progress with the review. This will be followed throughout May with Strategic Health Authorities launching their local vision plans. These plans are the result of the local clinical pathway work that has taken place over the last year. The final report will be published on 1 July to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the NHS.

Important update on NHS Pensions

Changes to the NHS Pension Scheme have been agreed; however, talks with the Department of Health (DH) and the Pensions Division (PD) continue.

In addition to the general governance arrangements which need to be set up, particular issues of importance are the implementation in April and how the ‘choice exercise’ will be conducted in 2009/2010.

The PD is preparing materials and workshops to assist employers in implementing the changes but it would be helpful if stewards raise questions at joint consultative committees about what arrangements employers are making. For example, ‘are pensions officer posts being filled?’ and ‘is employee information up-to-date?’.

This last issue is particularly significant and the PD is currently undertaking a cleansing exercise. They are particularly concerned about the quality of data where payroll is subcontracted out and the provider has not updated the PD about relevant changes to data.

The interim arrangements for the new member contribution rates starting from 1 April have been agreed and are available on the RCN website.

Members retiring before 2 April 2008 should note that different rules and benefits will apply. It is important to understand the differences before deciding on which date to retire – see the ‘retiring soon’ factsheet on the PD website.

For more information, see www.rcn.org.uk/nhspensionsreview and www.pensions.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Factsheet on ill health pension provision

RCN WING has produced a factsheet for activists and members on the new Ill Health Retirement provision in the NHS Pension Scheme. For your copy, call 0845 408 4392 or email wing@rcn.org.uk
RCN responds to MNC consultations

The RCN has responded to the two Modernising Nursing Careers (MNC) consultations on the future for pre-registration nurse education and a framework for post registration nursing careers. The RCN responses were collated from members’ views that were generated in RCN board and professional forum meetings, specific focus groups and road shows, by correspondence and online via the RCN website.

There was consensus over a number of areas including the:

• concept of stepping on and off pre-registration education programmes
• need for a formalised period of consolidation for newly qualified nurses
• need for a clear career pathway from novice to advanced practitioner.

Unsurprisingly the most hotly contested areas were around the design and content of pre-registration education – namely, if, what and when there should be a focus on particular nursing arenas or branches at pre-registration level, and the scope of the suggested five post registration career pathways.

The RCN responses can be found at www.rcn.org.uk/policy

The next stage in this process will be analysis and publication of the responses by the Department of Health and NMC, which will be summarised in Activate when available.

RCN takes next steps to going digital!

We are pleased to announce the successful launch of a new, pilot RCN e-newsletter – Telecare. It was sent out to members of the RCN Information in Nursing Group last month, and you can read all the articles at www.rcn.org.uk/information/telecare

We are now developing e-versions of more of our regular communications – so if you would like to ensure you receive them as and when they become available, register your email address and subscribe to the Email Service at www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn

Protection against needlestick injuries

The RCN is urging the European Commission to introduce legislation that will protect health care workers across Europe from blood-borne infections due to needlestick injuries.

We responded to a second consultation from the Commission in January supporting initiatives they propose, such as a complete end to the recapping of needles, training workers in the safe use and disposal of needles and other medical sharps, and immediate and effective response to any accidental exposure. Copies of our responses to EU and International consultations are available from www.rcn.org.uk/policy
Expired warnings

Chris Cox, RCN Legal Adviser, updates us on the legal position

Last year, I advised you of a case in which the Employment Appeal Tribunal held that an employer could not take into account an expired disciplinary warning when deciding to dismiss an employee.

However, the Court of Appeal has now reversed the legal position. The Court declared that, although reliance upon an expired warning is a relevant factor in deciding whether the employer has acted reasonably, it does not inevitably mean that the dismissal is unfair.

In the case of Airbus v. Webb, Mr Webb had been given a final written warning for misusing company time and the warning lasted twelve months. One month after it expired, he was apprehended watching TV during company time with some colleagues, and dismissed, although his colleagues were not. The Court of Appeal held that the dismissal was fair.

RCN Wales celebrates increase in funded nurse training places

After twelve months of campaigning, RCN Wales is pleased to announce an increase in the number of places for nursing students, district nurses and other key roles.

The RCN Wales Get it right – right numbers campaign argued strongly that the loss of skilled community nurses is becoming increasingly problematic as patients with more complex needs are being discharged earlier into the community. This coincided with government calls for the NHS to focus on moving out of the acute hospital and into the community.

The Welsh Assembly Government announced that the number of funded post-registration nursing places in Wales will rise by 23.9 per cent and places for nursing students are also set to increase by 2 per cent. The number of district nurses able to access training is set to increase from 35 to 98.

Director of RCN Wales Tina Donnelly commented, “RCN Wales welcomes this significant increase in community nursing training places and we believe that patient care will now benefit from this investment.”

And finally from Wales...

After lobbying by RCN Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government has now increased mileage rates. Rates are now the same as those in NHS England, and will be backdated to 1 January. For more details see www.rcn.org.uk/support

Looking for funding? Try the Mary Seacole Award

Have you got an idea for a project you want to undertake, or have you seen a course that you’d like to start and the only thing stopping you is the lack of funding?

If your project or course would enhance patient or client-focused care you may be eligible to apply for a Mary Seacole Award.

The Mary Seacole Leadership Awards and the Mary Seacole Development Awards were set up by the Department of Health (England) and provide opportunities for nurses, midwives or health visitors in England to undertake educational or development activity to enhance patient/client-focused care.

Each Mary Seacole Leadership Award is worth up to £12,500, and the Mary Seacole Development Awards, which should benefit the health needs of people from black and minority ethnic communities, are worth up to £6,250 each.

The closing date is 7 May 2008, and application forms with further details are available to download from www.rcn.org.uk/scholarshipsawards
Happy 10th Birthday, RCN Direct!

Celebrations were held throughout the first week of March to mark the tenth anniversary of the launch of RCN Direct, the RCN’s advice centre.

Launched on 1 March 1998, the RCN responded to the needs of its members and activists by providing an accessible, universal information portal covering the four main subject areas that affected its members – employment relations, legal issues, nursing and RCN services.

As well as providing information and advice, RCN Direct also established online information pages, long before the trend of internet and email advice evolved. RCN Direct responds to 1,000 web enquiries every month and is currently working with the RCN Institute to build on this success and to make advice-giving even more relevant and accessible through online tools.

RCN Direct receives 5,000 calls from members each month, 90 per cent of which are answered in less than one minute, and only 20 per cent of which are referred on within the organisation for further assistance.

With the Member Satisfaction Survey reporting a high approval rating and RCN Direct reaching the finals of the Welsh Contact Centre Awards, new manager Terina Jones can be proud of her own and her team’s achievements in providing an excellent service that RCN members expect.

RCN Direct is open from 8.30am to 8.30pm, 7 days a week, 365 days a year on telephone 0845 772 6100.

New RCN guidance for advanced nurse practitioners

The nurse practitioner role is becoming more prevalent, with increasing numbers of nurse practitioners now working in secondary and tertiary care settings such as emergency departments, minor injury units, medical assessment units and within specialties such as paediatrics and oncology. The term advanced nurse practitioner (ANP) is increasingly being used in the UK to acknowledge the advanced level of the role, the scope of practice and its associated competencies.

The RCN has revised its guidance to define the ANP role and includes RCN’s domains and competencies for ANPs in the UK, and the standards which collaborating higher education institutions must meet for their ANP educational programmes to receive RCN accreditation.

Download your copy from www.rcn.org.uk/publications.

Dates for your diary

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<tr>
<td>27 April – 1 May</td>
<td>RCN Congress and Exhibition 2008 Bournemouth International Centre</td>
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<td>26 June</td>
<td>RCN London Region activists’ conference RCN HQ, London</td>
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<td>27 June</td>
<td>Working overseas: humanitarian aid and development – use your skills to change lives RCN HQ, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>27-28 June</td>
<td>UK Joint Representatives’ Conference Hinckley Island Hotel, Leicestershire</td>
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For further information on training courses, events and venues, please contact your local RCN office.