A new RCN campaign has been launched to highlight the importance of good working conditions for nursing staff and to encourage employers to work in partnership with representatives to improve the working environment.

The Healthy Workplace, Healthy You campaign was launched at the UK Joint Representatives' Conference in Belfast earlier this month (see pages 6 and 7 for more).

It calls on representatives to use a new RCN toolkit to identify areas where improvements are needed, develop action plans and pledge to make changes alongside employers.

RCN Senior Employment Relations Adviser Kim Sunley said: “This campaign is going to have a positive impact for nursing staff and patient care. There are proven links between healthy workplaces and patient outcomes, and this campaign will help improve health and wellbeing for members across the UK.”

The campaign came from a resolution at RCN Congress last year where members asked Council to take action to reduce the impact of poor working environments. It has been launched against a backdrop of recent evidence showing members find their roles so stressful that less than half would recommend nursing as a career.

“This campaign is absolutely needed,” said Tracey Budding, Vice Chair of the Membership and Representation Committee. “Members are being worked to the bone in hugely pressurised environments. Many feel so undervalued they’re thinking of leaving the profession.”

Eighty-two per cent of respondents to the bi-annual RCN employment survey said they had worked when not feeling well enough to do so, with 46 per cent saying the main reason was work-related stress. More than a third said bullying and harassment is a problem in their workplace.

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/nursemorale for more information.
The RCN has submitted evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) based on responses to its biannual employment survey.

The submission highlights the rate of nursing morale and recommends an uplift that restores the loss of earnings incurred through cumulative years of low-inflation pay awards.

The Government has said it will only fund public sector pay increases of one per cent a year for the next four years. It has also said awards should be targeted, so some staff could receive more than one per cent, while others get less.

The RCN has rejected this proposal, arguing that it would be divisive and could threaten to derail talks on the future of the NHS pay structure. The College has also recommended that the NHS should be a living wage employer across the UK.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has confirmed that revalidation will come into force from April 2016.

The organisation governing Council gave the final go-ahead for the process that will see all nurses and midwives in the UK having to demonstrate every three years that they have practised safely and effectively and can remain on the register.

A series of pilot schemes received positive feedback from RCN members involved and General Secretary Janet Davies has said she believes revalidation is a good thing for nursing and will enhance patient outcomes. She has urged representatives to be prepared should members need assistance with the process.

“Revalidation was one of the recommendations of Sir Robert Francis to improve patient care. It is vitally important that nurses stay up to date with best practice. The RCN has worked with the NMC to develop this work,” she said.

“Our representatives should familiarise themselves with the revalidation process to help support members as this comes into force. People mustn’t be alarmed. Everybody should be able to do this.”

She confirmed that a pay campaign team has been set up called on the Government to provide more clarity on their plans over public sector pay increases, which have so far been vague and capped at one per cent.

“The RCN is also continuing to fight over proposed restrictions for overseas nurses working in the UK with Janet confirming she will attend the Home Affairs Select Committee meeting to discuss the issue.

She also criticised the Trade Union Bill and its efforts to undermine unions and reduce the amount of facilities time available to accredited representatives.

“Facilities time is incredibly important for us and our members. We have research showing that union representation can save the NHS £100 million a year,” she said.

Making her first speech to representatives as General Secretary, Janet thanked members for their warmth when she took up the role.

“We are all in this together,” she said. “We need to work as one to create safe working environments otherwise there is no chance for professional development.”

RCN General Secretary Janet Davies has outlined her vision for the RCN and issued a call to arms for representatives to help shape the future of the College.

Speaking at the Joint Representatives’ Conference in Belfast, she said representatives had the chance to step up and impact the work of the RCN.

“This is a trade union. The active members are key to what we do. There is nothing we can do without our membership wishing it to happen and doing it with us.

“Over the next few years I want to see us working closer together and using your intelligence to develop a way forward.”

On 1 October, health service caps on agency spending came into force. From 1 October, additional rules take effect meaning all nursing agency procurement must be on approved frameworks. The RCN is keen to monitor what impact this has on the supply of nurses and is urging representatives to get in touch if they feel it is affecting trusts’ ability to maintain safe staffing levels.

Contact your local patch officer to share information in the first instance.

Members may have to pay increased National Insurance (NI) contributions from April 2016 due to the introduction of the new State Retirement Pension (RSP). The RSP brings an end to arrangements that allowed some nursing staff to “contract out” of NI payments that went towards the additional state pension. See page 4 of the October issue of RCN Bulletin or visit www.gov.uk/new-state-pension/overview for more.

As part of the ongoing Is that discrimination? project the RCN is keen to find examples of where partnership working has challenged discrimination and promoted equality in the workplace. Do you have examples of good practice that you are willing to share? Have you tackled discrimination and inequality in the workplace? Email wendy.irwin@rcn.org.uk to share your story.
More must be done for staff morale

"We want nurses to feel able to recommend their profession"

Members need to feel that nursing is a valued profession, says Josie Irwin, RCN Head of Employment Relations

Nursing staff are the lifeblood of health care. We all know that. It’s why you took up the profession and it’s why we, at the RCN, work hard to support you to do the job best possible.

It is so disheartening to read the results of the latest RCN employment survey with less than half of respondents (45 per cent) saying they would recommend nursing as a career and many saying they were contemplating leaving the profession. We heard of nursing staff working themselves sick (literally), skipping their breaks, working late every shift and operating under increasing pressure.

The worrying underlying trend of bullying and harassment just won’t go away with 34 per cent of respondents saying they thought it was an issue important as it’s you who can help make a difference by making sure members are treated fairly and feel able to raise concerns.

The role of our representatives has never been more important as it’s you who can help make a difference by making sure members are treated fairly and feel able to raise concerns.

Employers, the NHS and the Government need to work together to make workplaces better. A simple way to do this is to endorse the RCN’s Healthy Workplace, Healthy You campaign. We want nurses to feel able to recommend their profession again.

Is it reasonable for annual leave to be restricted during the holiday season?

Annual leave can only be taken once authorised by an employer and employers can generally refuse annual leave requests provided they give the correct amount of notice. However, there needs to be a balance between the needs of the service and the employee’s right to take annual leave. Staff may also have flexible working or health needs that should be considered. Check the following:

- local written policies on when leave can be taken
- whether the restriction is just an interim measure while “preferences” are gathered
- the approach taken in previous years.

If this has changed, why?

A blanket ban on leave during December may push the limits of reasonableness, particularly where it becomes difficult to take leave at all. However, employees will be taking a risk if they book holidays and flights without having their leave authorised.

It is better for employees to give managers as much notice of their requests as possible. A conversation may be all that is needed to resolve this issue.

For more information, speak in confidence to an RCN Direct adviser any time between 8.30am and 8.30pm, 365 days per year.

View from the frontline

Keep fighting for better conditions

As activists we are often faced with situations that feel like we’re fighting a losing battle. The Government continues to leave nursing staff underpaid, conditions become less favourable and so on.

But there is still hope and much of that comes from our collective ability to stand up and be heard. Stewards play an important role in listening to members and arguing the case and this is only going to become more important with the threat against unsocial hours’ payments.

I was involved in the battle against the South West pay cartel and having seen that we won, it’s clear that we can stand up against the powers that be. If stewards are active and visible it encourages members to come forward with any issues they face and allows us to campaign strongly and make a difference for all our members on the ground.

In my experience this will only become more important with new rules on overseas nurses, caps on agency spending and pressure on nurses with workloads and extra non-clinical duties.

I am hopeful that we can all stand together and make positive changes for all. We are stronger together and our voices are louder as one.

Kathy Lawrie, Chair of the RCN Devon Branch and South West Representative on the RCN Stewards’ Committee

LEGAL UPDATE

Associative discrimination

How high from the ground an electricity supplier installed its meters was the basis of a potentially significant discrimination law decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CHEZ Razpredelenie Bulgaria AD v Kosimia za Zashtita ot Diskriminatsia (2015)).

The meters were placed higher in the claimant’s district than elsewhere, because this was a predominantly Roma area, with the apparent aim of avoiding tampering.

This meant the claimant now couldn’t reach her meter and, although she wasn’t Roma, she argued that she was discriminated against because of someone else’s ethnicity.

Under disability law, the European court had previously upheld a claim of “associative discrimination” whereby a mother of a disabled child was found to have been directly discriminated against because of her child’s disability.

In the recent discrimination case, the court also upheld the claim. It said that the principle of equal treatment applies not to a particular category of person, but by reference to the grounds of discrimination:

“The principle is intended to benefit also persons who, although not themselves a member of the race or ethnic group concerned, nevertheless suffer less favourable treatment or a particular disadvantage on one of those grounds.”

On the face of it, the court’s language appears to extend the right to claim associative discrimination to claims of indirect, as well as direct, discrimination.

So, for example, a male nurse wishing to work part-time for child care reasons may now be able to argue that he has suffered associative indirect sex discrimination as a result of a policy of full-time work.

Chris Cox
RCN Director of Legal Services

Keep fighting for better conditions

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RCN Director of Legal Services
The RCN has launched a campaign, with new resources for representatives, to improve working conditions for nursing staff.

Recent research undertaken by the RCN has shown nurses being placed in intolerable situations, working themselves sick and feeling unable to deliver the care they would like. Increased workloads and reduction in staff numbers has led many members to contact the College asking for help.

In response, the RCN has launched a new campaign called Healthy Workplace, Healthy You to improve working conditions for all nursing staff.

A Healthy Workplace Toolkit has been produced as part of the project and is available for representatives to download.

It identifies the elements that make a healthy workplace and how to make improvements. It also encourages representatives to make pledges, in partnership with employers, to improve working conditions.

The Healthy Workplace element of the campaign is divided into five domains:

**Work-life balance**
A healthy work-life balance is having sufficient control and autonomy over where, when and how you work to fulfil your responsibilities within and outside paid work. Employees should have flexible working opportunities as research shows family-friendly working practices improve productivity and performance, reduce unplanned absence and support recruitment and retention of staff.

**Dignity at work**
Dignity is about how people feel, think and behave in relation to the worth or value of themselves and others. It is about showing respect for all staff and allowing them to feel worthy and that their individual traits are important. Treating patients and clients with dignity is essential in nursing practice but, in order to do this effectively, nursing staff must also be treated with dignity by their employers, managers and colleagues. Dignity in the workplace can also promote greater willingness to embrace change and learn new skills.

**Health and safety**
Health and safety in the workplace is obviously crucial but the campaign looks at wellbeing in relation to health at work. Organisations are increasingly aware that health, safety and wellbeing is more than just the absence of work-related disease or injury; it is about an emphasis on achieving physical, mental and social contentment among staff.

**Job design**
The best workplaces ensure that tasks are matched to the skills and qualifications of employees to get the best atmosphere and productivity. Poorly designed jobs can lead to psychological and physical ill health. According to the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (2015), the way in which a job is designed has great impact on the attitude, beliefs and feelings of the employee.

**Learning and development**
Employees should feel that they have the opportunity to develop and grow within their workplace. Your job should be something that challenges you and develops your skillset to provide the highest levels of patient care. There should be statutory/mandatory training in place in every organisation to ensure all staff comply with health and safety regulations and can identify and address risk.

**Prioritising yourself**
“Because nurses are already of a caring nature they often put everybody else before themselves. How many nurses out there are working overtime or coming into work when they feel ill because they are scared of leaving their department short? Whereas they would advise patients to take time off to look after themselves,” says Tanja.

The Healthy You leaflet, like the Healthy Workplace Toolkit has various elements. They focus on body, mind, heart, work, career, spirit, and balance. They are all areas where nursing staff can improve their own wellbeing or establish goals for the future.

“We want to embed an attitude of self-care within the nursing culture so individuals can sustain their health and wellbeing and consequently provide excellent patient care,” says Tanja.

The Healthy Workplace, Healthy You campaign seeks to work with nurses but also employers to allow individuals to feel able to encourage change and promote health and wellbeing.

**Having a balance**
Tanja says a combination of the two is needed if the campaign is to succeed. “It’s a double-edged sword. We need to ensure employers put the right conditions in place for people to work in healthy ways. There are pressures on staff numbers but you have to balance the stress levels in your life. There is an optimum amount whereby you feel pushed and challenged without being overloaded.”

Support is always available from the RCN’s counselling service but it’s hoped Healthy You can help nurses recognise aspects of their wellbeing that need improvement before a crisis point is reached.

Tanja says: “It’s a holistic approach. Not every aspect of self-care might apply to every individual but they can use the different sections at different points in their life.

“Sometimes, after experiencing trauma or going through times of high stress, it might just help to look from a different perspective.”

**Healthy workplace**
Call to action
Representatives are urged to download the toolkit and start identifying areas where improvements can be made. Pledge your support today and encourage employers to do the same. Download the toolkit from www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplacetoolkit

**Healthy you**
**“Poorly designed jobs can lead to psychological and physical ill health”**

As part of its new Healthy Workplace, Healthy You campaign, the RCN is encouraging members to prioritise their own health and wellbeing.

The Healthy You element of the campaign emphasises the importance of nursing staff having ownership of their own physical and mental health and taking the time to apply the same level of care to their personal wellbeing as they would to their patients.

Tanja Koch, Counselling Co-ordinator at the RCN, says: “We see a lot of members at the counselling service who are at the very extreme. We wanted to develop something that will encourage members to recognise when they’re neglecting their own health and find ways to deal with what’s affecting them.”

The leaflet identifies techniques to help you prevent and manage physical and emotional stress. It outlines that self-care and self-compassion are the foundations on which you are able to engage positively with others, be that your family, colleagues or patients.

The Boorman review into health and wellbeing in the NHS highlighted the relationship between staff health and wellbeing and patient safety, the patient experience and the effectiveness of care.

**“We want to embed an attitude of self-care within the nursing culture”**

Find out more
For more information go to www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace
This month's Tools of the Trade includes a guide for representatives on working from home. The Labour Research Department booklet, entitled Working From Home – A Negotiator’s Guide for Trade Union Reps, looks at how trade unions can play a key role in establishing successful homeworking arrangements that benefit both the worker and the employer. Visit http://tinyurl.com/njmq924

A new toolkit from NHS Employers aims to improve staff health and wellbeing and provide step-by-step guidance on implementing the six pieces of workplace guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. To access the toolkit go to http://tinyurl.com/po76h5l

There are concerns that current immigration rules compromise patient safety as NHS organisations and independent health and social care providers experience difficulties in recruiting staff. A letter from NHS Employers calls for nursing to be added to the shortage occupation list. For more details on this visit http://tinyurl.com/oe87pxr.


Works for Me is the latest research on UK attitudes from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. To download the report visit http://tinyurl.com/qelzrf8

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has announced plans for changes to apprenticeship funding from 2017. The BIS is proposing a new apprenticeship levy, payable by all large companies including the NHS, to fund apprenticeships. The Government has a target of creating three million apprenticeships by 2020 and there will be increasing pressure on the public and private sectors to achieve this number.

The new levy funding will run in tandem with existing Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding creating a two-tier system. SFA funding will be primarily targeted at under-25s with employer contributions for over-25s, while the apprenticeship levy funding can be used to support all ages.

RCN Scotland has produced a briefing for stewards on the RCN’s current position in relation to pay and to terms and conditions for all staff covered by Agenda for Change. The briefing covers the RCN’s strategic approach and outlines the position in Scotland, including reference to the increasing variation in terms and conditions that have been negotiated.

The briefing will be emailed to all stewards in Scotland this week. Also read it at http://tinyurl.com/p3avenv

Theresa Fyffe said it’s important to take it step by step. “Opening up access to social media in this way is a huge change for the RCN, and we want to make sure we get it right,” said Theresa.

“We want to see what works and what doesn’t, which is why we’ve started out by trialling Facebook groups in a few areas. We know how enthusiastic others are to join in, but we really need to look at how the pilot groups are working, and to iron out any problems, before we roll this out more widely. That will help us make sure we develop the right tools for the wider activist network in the long term.”

For the first time ever you can now download Activate on your smartphone or tablet via the RCN Activate app.

It means you can read news and features from this month's Activate in an easily accessible format when you’re on the move.

The app has interactivity for all the articles, giving you instant access to online resources and publications referenced in any of the features in Activate.

The app is available on iPhone and Android devices, simply go to the app store or Google Play and download the RCN Activate app.

Email us at activate@rcn.org.uk and let us know what you think.