

Health priorities for the next UK government

a manifesto from the Royal College of Nursing



Ban smoking in public places

Safer workplaces

Focus on recruitment and retention

Fund long term nursing care

Improve patient care:

put nurses on every board

School nurses for all children



Health priorities for the next UK government



With over 370,000 members, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing in the UK. RCN members work in all aspects of health care, in the NHS and in the independent sector.

Nursing staff deliver 80% of health care and are powerful advocates for patients. Nursing makes a difference; higher numbers of registered nurses lead to better patient care.

A manifesto from the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is fully committed to the principles of the NHS: equity of access to a comprehensive range of high quality services free at the point of use, funded through progressive taxation.

The messages in this document are what RCN members across the UK consider to be the health priorities for the next government. We will be lobbying the next UK government to make them happen.





RCN priorities for the next UK government

Improve public health by:

Banning smoking in public places

Nurses see the deadly effects of smoking on people every day. Smoking is responsible for 114,000 deaths a year. It is estimated that a ban on smoking in public places would save the NHS over £2.7 billion a year. **The RCN calls on the next government to ban smoking in all enclosed public places, including workplaces, bars and restaurants.**

Ensuring every child has access to a school nurse

The dangers of an unhealthy lifestyle – obesity, smoking, poor sexual health – are a key challenge. School nurses are vital in ensuring our children get the best possible start in life, offering information on healthy eating, exercise, smoking, mental health, drugs and sexual health, as well as playing a key role in child protection. **The RCN wants every child to have access to a school nurse.**

Support nurses and patients by:

Continuing to focus on recruiting and retaining nurses

Improving health and health care is dependent on getting and keeping the right numbers of appropriately trained nurses. Welcome advances have been made in recent years, but sustainability for the future will be key. **The RCN wants to see: support for nurse education, students and educators; nurses being valued by improving their working lives and remunerating them properly; a focus on retaining older, experienced staff.**

Improve workplace safety by legislating to ensure that all those who commit acts of violence against health care staff are prosecuted

No nurse should have to put up with violence at work. Last year NHS staff suffered more than 116,000 violent attacks. **The RCN wants assaults against health care staff to be given the same legal status as assaults against the police, with attackers prosecuted and appropriately sentenced.**

Improve services by:

Ensuring there is a nurse on every strategic decision-making board who can influence and improve service delivery - from bedside to boardroom

Nurses are the primary providers of care, public health and chronic disease management. Services benefit from the direct involvement of clinicians in strategic decision making. **The RCN wants to see nurses on every decision-making board, shaping the way care is commissioned, managed and delivered.**

Fully funding long term nursing care across all four countries of the UK

Care of the vulnerable is at the heart of nursing. **The RCN wants to see long term nursing care fully funded across the UK, so that appropriate nursing services can be provided to those who need them.**

The RCN in **England** has over 300,000 members.



Ban on smoking

There are 10 million smokers in England. 3,600 people a year die from second hand smoke. The Chief Medical Officer suggests that a ban on smoking in public and workplaces would save the country £2.3 – £2.7 billion annually, equivalent to treating 1.3 – 1.5 million hospital waiting list patients.

School nursing

There are estimated to be only 2,000 school nurses covering 20,000 schools across England. The numbers must be increased if improvements in children's health are to be made.

Recruitment and retention of nurses

Although there have been considerable improvements in nurse numbers in England, there is still variation in vacancy rates both geographically and by specialty. The RCN estimates that there are 25,000 vacancies across England. A quarter of nurses are due to retire in the next five years.

Violence at work

In 2003, over one third of NHS staff in England suffered harassment, bullying and abuse at work, with one in six experiencing physical violence. Violence and aggression not only causes injury and distress (and leads to sickness absence and low morale), it stops patients being treated.

Nurses at decision-making level

Nurses are proven modernisers. In England, the RCN wants a requirement for nurses to be on decision-making boards in strategic health authorities, primary care trusts, care trusts, mental health trusts, NHS (acute) trusts, foundation trusts, inspectorates and all other bodies which shape the way health care is planned, managed and delivered, in all sectors.

Long term nursing care

Access to, and funding of long term nursing care remains a lottery, especially for patients with mental health needs. Nursing care should be assessed by nurses, delivered by the nursing workforce and funded centrally by the NHS. The NHS must care for those who are vulnerable. The RCN calls for an end to false divisions of care created by restrictive and unworkable criteria for accessing continuing care and funded nursing.

The RCN in Northern Ireland has over 12,000 members.



Ban on smoking

The smoking ban introduced in the Republic of Ireland has been highly successful in protecting from the dangers of passive smoking, helping to cut smoking levels and demonstrating leadership and vision in public health. Nurses play a leading role in smoking cessation and must be closely involved in the design of services to support the introduction of a workplace smoking ban.

School nursing

There are estimated to be only 78 school nurses covering around 1,200 schools across Northern Ireland. It is clear that we need many more school nurses if improvements in the health of children and young people are to be achieved and sustained. Investing in school nursing is investing in the future health of Northern Ireland.

Recruitment and retention of nurses

The recent increase in the number of nurses in Northern Ireland is almost entirely due to international recruitment, rather than to any improvement in the training, recruitment and retention of local nurses. There are still serious nursing shortages in many parts of Northern Ireland. Providing a fair level of financial support for nursing students, particularly those with child care responsibilities, would be an important step towards recruiting and retaining sufficient nurses for the future.

Violence at work

Over 5,000 cases of physical and verbal abuse were recorded against health and social services professionals in Northern Ireland in 2003. Nurses in Northern Ireland provide care to all sections of the community, often under the most difficult circumstances. Zero tolerance policies must be backed up by stiff sentences for those who assault, threaten and abuse health professionals.

Nurses at decision-making level

Northern Ireland has a reasonably good record of involving nurses at a decision-making level within health and social services trusts, boards and local health and social care groups. However, given the pace of change within health and social services, the current Review of Public Administration and the number of major new strategies being implemented within the NI Health and Personal Social Services (HPSS), the RCN believes that there should be a formal requirement for nurses to be on all decision-making bodies.

Long term nursing care

Caring for patients in nursing homes costs around one-third of the price of long-term hospital care. Nursing homes must be adequately resourced. This means ensuring that the HPSS contribution to the cost of nursing care is sufficient to enable homes to pay nurses appropriately, maintain standards and to support them in their professional practice. In Northern Ireland, as across the United Kingdom, nursing homes have been closing because they are unable to sustain themselves financially. Nursing home care must not be provided on the cheap. Patients, their families and nurses deserve much better than this.

The RCN in **Scotland** has over 35,500 members.



Ban on smoking

Support for a ban on smoking in enclosed public places in Scotland has been steadily building. While a UK-wide ban is probably the most effective way to proceed, RCN Scotland will back other measures tabled in the Scottish Parliament to restrict smoking in Scotland until action is taken across the UK.

School nursing

There are 2,641 primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland with only one nurse to every 2,154 students - less than half of these have a school nursing qualification. The contribution that school nurses make to the health of children and young people has been recognised in the Executive's School Nursing Framework (Scottish Executive 2003). Resources dedicated to school nursing must match the needs of each local area, taking account of Scotland's differing levels of social deprivation, rural, remote and island considerations.

Recruitment and retention of nurses

Some progress has been made in addressing Scotland's recruitment problems, but fundamental issues remain. Scotland's nursing workforce is growing more slowly than the rest of the UK and vacancies have risen every year since 2001, to reach 2,090 in March 2004. Expenditure on agency and bank staff has increased dramatically over the last few years, reaching £80 million in 2003-04. The focus must now be on retaining experienced nurses and students.

Violence at work

Attacks on nursing and other health care staff have been increasing across Scotland. RCN Scotland has broadly supported the Scottish Executive's Emergency Workers (Scotland) Bill, while pressing for a more inclusive approach to the protection of all health care workers. Allocating resources and implementing measures to make premises safer and more secure is a key issue for NHS staff. The Health and Safety Executive needs greater support to enforce its recommendations.

Nurses at decision-making level

The proven benefit of nurses as clinical leaders and the unique perspective they bring to the design of services should be recognised. RCN Scotland led a campaign to have nurse directors appointed to NHS Boards, implemented in July 2002. Now we want to see nurses and nursing represented on the new Community Health Partnerships. RCN Scotland wants all parties in Scotland to commit to the principle of nurse representation and clinical leadership in all levels of decision-making in health care in Scotland.

Long term nursing care

RCN Scotland wants to see the Scottish Executive acknowledge the true costs of providing quality patient care - including the contribution to the care of those vulnerable groups requiring ongoing care. Funding of care homes is not currently adequate. Care is therefore compromised and care homes are closing.

The RCN in **Wales** has over 20,000 members.



Ban on smoking

In Wales, 31.5% of the population smoke. Tobacco use is the single most important preventable cause of premature death and illness in Wales. Death rates in Wales from lung cancer are among the highest in the developed world. Last year the Welsh Assembly Government voted in principle to banning smoking in public places, but does not have the legislative powers to impose any ban.

School nursing

There are currently 206 trust-employed qualified school nurses in Wales, and there are 485,024 pupils attending 2,037 schools. There is a need to rapidly reverse the decline of the school nursing service. The RCN wants to see a qualified nurse in every school.

Recruitment and retention of nurses

More nurses, midwives, and health visitors were recruited during 2002-03 than any other sector of NHS Wales staff, yet there are more than 400 nursing vacancies across Wales. There are 4,000 non-practising nurses in Wales under the age of 55. This pool of nursing expertise could fill every vacancy in NHS Wales ten times over; however, only 16% of these 4,000 nurses want to return to the profession as it is. Working patterns are a major factor in the challenge to retain current staff and attract nurses back into the profession.

Violence at work

More than 50% of nurses in Wales have suffered harassment, bullying and physical abuse at some point in their careers. The professional conditions under which nurses must carry out their duties is disturbing. The RCN wants to see a policy of zero tolerance on violence occurring in all NHS trusts and clinical environments in Wales. Nurses deserve better than to face routinely the risk of bullying and violence.

Nurses at decision-making level

The Welsh Assembly Government has made real progress in appointing nurses on to local health boards at executive level. We want to build on this so that nurses are able to input strategically on decision-making boards in every health organisation across the UK.

Long term nursing care

The Welsh Assembly Government supports the principle of funded free care but has done little to push for its implementation. The RCN feels that the Assembly would benefit from having primary legislative powers to act independently on this matter. RCN Wales calls for an end to false divisions of care created by restrictive and unworkable criteria for assessing continuing care and funded nursing.

“The RCN is fully committed to the principles of the NHS”



The statistics in this manifesto have been drawn from the following documents and websites:

Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk

Healthcare Commission (2004) 2003 NHS staff survey. London: Healthcare Commission. www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

National statistics www.statistics.gov.uk

Scottish health statistics www.isdscotland.org

Further reading

Buchan J and Seccombe I 2004 *Going global? UK Nursing Labour Market Commentary 2003 / 2004*. London: RCN, www.rcn.org.uk web only.

Royal College of Nursing (2003) *Defining nursing*. London: RCN, www.rcn.org.uk web only.

Royal College of Nursing (2003) *Defining nursing. Summary leaflet* London: RCN, Publication code 001 983.

Royal College of Nursing (2004) *The future nurse: the RCN vision*. London:RCN. Publication code 002 303

Royal College of Nursing (2004) *The future nurse: evidence of the impact of registered nurses*. London: RCN, www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/policy, web only.

Royal College of Nursing (2004) *Stepping Stones: results from the RCN membership survey 2003*. London: RCN. Publication code 002 235.

Scottish Executive (2003) *A Scottish framework for nursing in schools*. Edinburgh: The Stationery Office.

Useful websites

Action on Smoking and Health www.ash.org.uk

Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Scottish Executive Health Department www.scotland.gov.uk/about/departments/hd

Welsh Assembly Government Health and Social Care Department www.wales.gov.uk/subihealth/index.htm

For more information or to talk to nurses in your area, please contact the RCN parliamentary offices at:

Royal College of Nursing

20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN

Tel. 020 7647 3628

RCN Northern Ireland

17 Windsor Avenue, Belfast BT9 6EE

Tel. 028 9066 8236

RCN Scotland

42 South Oswald Road, Edinburgh EH9 2HH

Tel. 0131 662 1010

RCN Wales

Ty Maeth, King George V Drive East, Cardiff CF14 4XZ

Tel. 029 2075 1373

A Welsh language version of this document is also available.

You can order further copies of this document (and a Welsh language version) from RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100, quote publication code 002457 or 002458 for Welsh version. Alternatively, you can download them from the RCN website.

You can also find out more about what the RCN is doing on these issues and what you can do by visiting the RCN website at www.rcn.org.uk

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Publication code: 002457

