

# OUTER SW LONDON RCN BRANCH NEWSLETTER



## Big Clap for all our Branch members exceptional service over the last 4 months!

So many amazing stories have surfaced during the COVID19 pandemic which has hit south west London particularly badly. At time of writing 281 patients had died from the Coronavirus at Epsom & St Helier, but over 470 patients were discharged after being nursed back to health.

We know that 24% of NHS staff have had the virus locally after antibody testing and unfortunately at least one nurse colleague has died, but you have kept turning up to work, often over and above your paid hours and many of you have returned to clinical roles from other jobs. Many have been sacrificial to do so. It's been amazing to see the generosity of employers and local businesses providing food, treats, free car parking and flexible working practices to try and help the pressures that we have all been working under. You are all truly amazing people and so deserving of the weekly clap for carers and key workers of recent months.

## London welcomes new Regional Director



Lisa Elliott, is a registered adult nurse whose career spans more than 20 years, took up her post as regional director on 24 February.

She said she was "incredibly excited" to take on the new leadership position at the RCN and described nursing in London as "unique".

Lisa's former role was director of nursing at Newham Health Collaborative – a GP federation representing all GP practices within the Newham Clinical Commissioning Group borough boundaries.

She said: "I am committed to helping shape the nursing agenda in London and continuing the work championed

by my predecessor in confronting the glaring race and equality issues in nursing, as well as continuing to advocate for better living and working conditions for nurses and nursing support workers across the capital."

Lisa has a master's degree in health and social care leadership from the University of Greenwich and lives with her two daughters and husband, who is also a nurse (info courtesy of Nursing Times.)

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# THANK YOU



## COVID-19 Changed my life

Rebecca Ellis, an Outer South West London RCN Branch member, is the Quality and Patient Safety Manager, for Planned Care at Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust. When the Coronavirus Pandemic hit the Trust in March 2020, she stepped out of her comfort zone and headed straight into the Covid-19 ITU red zone. The results changed her life ...

"On 17 March 2020, I luckily returned to England on one of the last flights to Heathrow from New York. The previous days had been spent in complete isolation of what was progressing across the globe in an idyllic sun-kissed resort, with only the offer of hand sanitiser in restaurants being a sign of anything out of the 'norm'. On my return to work, I received a phone call that would change everything. The question posed was 'You are an ITU trained nurse, is that correct?' Yes, 10 years previously, I had been a Lead Nurse in Critical Care and transitioned to Quality and Patient Safety. I had literally just renewed my NMC registration, due at the end of March. 'Can you please work in Intensive Care due to the current situation?' The reply without query was 'Yes'. I didn't even hesitate, once I knew the extent of what was happening on my return from holiday.



It was when I arrived for my first shift, I realised the enormity of the situation with ward and theatre nurses, physiotherapists, Associate Practitioners and other staff and others who had previously worked in ITU years ago, much like myself, I thought what will I face? I didn't know what to expect, the thoughts that went through my mind included: 'Will I remember, how things work?'; 'What will be expected of me?'; 'Will I catch something? I couldn't sleep, but the only thing that I repeatedly thought was 'Do what you can; if you don't know ask; and don't put yourself, patients or anyone at risk'. The PPE process made me scared. It was hot, uncomfortable and made me feel that I was going to be walking into a battle.

What was all this, goggles, pink hats and my name written on a sticker? My new identity? I still remember the first patient I cared for. 'Where do I start'? I was surrounded by staff I didn't know, alarms that weren't familiar to me, equipment I hadn't used before. What came to mind was, 'look after this gentleman using the skills you have. What does he look like, feel like and take it from there'. So it began. I remember going back to my car after my second shift and being physically sick.

I felt exhausted. Why were the patients so young, more male patients than female? That was the start of an intense professional, physical and emotional journey. Over the next days and weeks, I met, worked with and supported a range of colleagues from an array of professional backgrounds. There were no egos, just a team of people who had come together to care for a vast number of the sickest patients we had ever encountered. We learnt very quickly what we could and couldn't do due to physiological changes. Without touching a patient, oxygen levels and or blood pressure could decrease to grossly abnormal levels, which could take extreme lengths of time to correct.



I couldn't sleep when I got home. Like phantom pain, I still felt the mask on my face. For days I felt so tired in conjunction with physical body pain in my feet and joints. That didn't matter, I felt so proud. There were lots of signs of fear from others colleagues who had never been in an ITU environment. Seeing the confidence grow in them, was amazing. As confidence grew, so did compassion. Talking to patients, trying to meet patients' needs and 'being the support' when families could not visit. (continues page 3)



We supported each other. The team was acquiring skills that were making a difference. On one shift, Channel 4 news unexpectedly turned up and did an impromptu interview with me. I was just doing what I could. Why did I get emotional? The patient I was caring for was so young, her toes were painted and I could really relate to her, with her long hair tied up in a bun, which I do at home. In a way, it was like seeing myself in that bed. Unfortunately, Covid -19 had affected her in other ways which would affect her permanently. I said what I felt was important to me, being there was a 'privilege', to work in such a magnificent team was amazing. When I drove to work at 6:30, I felt like I was the only person in the world. Then arriving at work, it was like meeting friends who all felt the same, could relate and truly understand how you felt, as they were feeling the same way. It felt as if it was a real family, the ITU family, which was safe.

The biggest sacrifice was personal. I live with my then 16 year old daughter. I was scared for myself and her. We made plans of how I would come home and 'get clean'. I kept working predominantly my usual hours, as I didn't want my daughter being alone for longer than needed.

I did speak to my sisters who both live in the north of England and before starting my redeployment, made verbal plans in case I got ill. That was awful. During my time in ITU, my daughter celebrated her 17th birthday. I requested annual leave on the day and tried to make it as special as possible. I was so proud of my daughter who really 'stepped up', cleaning and cooking for me, maintaining our home so it was one less thing for me to do.

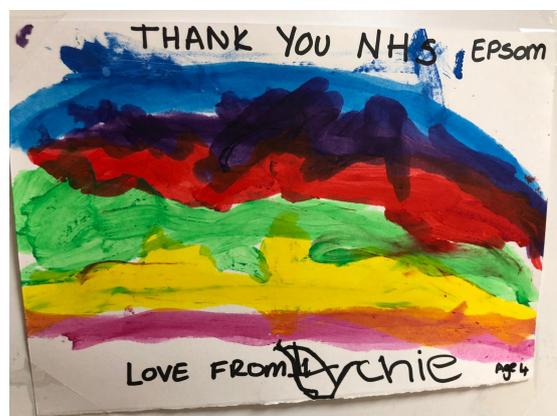
I didn't see my partner during the pandemic but I spoke to him everyday. He was there, virtually for me, which made a huge difference, even sending me flowers as did my colleagues. Although he couldn't understand what I encountered, he would listen.

During the time I was in ITU which was 8 weeks, all I did when not at work was nap on the sofa and try and rehydrate. I couldn't sleep at night as I kept constantly thinking of the Unit and 'had I missed something, did I handover all the information'. I also found myself looking more and more at Social media. It was almost as if my life was taken over by Covid-19. To see nursing colleagues, then key workers who had died, was really heartbreaking. Then, what really hit hard was a nurse called A, who I had worked with in ITU years before, died.

I truly believe that life for me, personally and professionally, will never be the same. It was a true privilege to care for those patients, to be part of a team of such professional diversity and work in a way where nothing could be predicted, but planned on an ever changing basis. Not all patient outcomes were as we hoped, which did produce tears, however, there were also tears of joy when we discharged patients who had combated this terrible thing called 'Covid-19'. Patients that we cared for may never know who we were, but those patients and the new friends I made in the team, will live with me for the rest of my life. Nursing allowed me to be part of this experience. Thank you to the NHS for giving me those skills. I didn't ever lose them.

My last shift on 12th May was so emotional. The unit was scaling down with the remaining patients being moved to the original unit which had a total of 8 beds. It was bitter sweet. There were so many staff and even two patients who I will always remember; lining the corridors as we walked proudly to celebrate what had been achieved.

We did what was needed that day. I sat in the unit afterwards not quite believing what had happened over the previous weeks, from holding a patient's hand and talking to them as they died to clapping when patients were discharged from the unit. The noises, numerous staff to silence. It was deafening. It will take time, I know, to move on from that way of working, returning to my normal role, which is so far removed from what I did in ITU. Would I do it again? With the same team, in a heartbeat".



## General Secretary puts PM straight on pay

The RCN's letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson in full after the secretary of state for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, told a news conference that nurses had a 15% pay increase in the last year!

Dear Prime Minister,

You have recently seen first-hand the professionalism and dedication of this nation's nursing staff.

You will also know that we entered the pandemic with a substantial shortage of nursing staff – at least 40,000 registered nurse vacancies in the NHS England alone, not accounting for social care.

Nursing staff were struggling to cope with the pressures caused by the shortage, already starting to leave before retirement, and many may not feel able to stay in the profession after the potentially intolerable pressures they will have faced during this crisis.

This is not the time to be complacent. The two nurses who saved you are part of a highly-skilled workforce that must be made to feel recognised, supported and valued. And those making career choices must see nursing as an attractive option.

The nation has never better understood or recognised our contribution to society, and we welcome the public interest in nursing pay.

But the majority of nursing staff will not recognise the 15% figure quoted by the UK Secretary of State for Health and Care at the daily press briefing (Friday 15 May 2020). Discussing pay out of the context of costs of living, combined with a suggestion elsewhere last week of a pay freeze, are totally out of step with nursing need and public support.

In 2018, we said that the pay deal was the bridge out of austerity that was needed. It would be right to acknowledge now what we said at the time – that more is needed to bring earnings in line with the cost of living, following so many years of pay restraint.

Our research confirms that the average earnings for NHS staff have not kept pace with the cost of living since 2010. This is the reality that must be fully recognised in the public conversation about recognising and valuing nursing staff. Any "fight for that fair reward", as your Health Secretary said, must begin on the basis of facts. This is the reality for current and future nursing staff making career choices.

We urge you to recognise in public conversation that this is where nursing pay is today. An honest dialogue in preparation for the future pay round is the first step in valuing the nursing workforce we rightly celebrate.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Donna Kinnair Ms  
Chief Executive and General Secretary  
Dee Sissons Chair of Council

Cc. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt  
Hon Matt Hancock MP



## Keeping Staff Healthy during the Pandemic

RCN health and safety reps have been key advocates in our local hospitals and communities challenging employers about the supply and distribution of Personal protective Equipment (PPE) and ensuring that adequate training and 'fit' testing has been done properly.

We have supported members who have underlying health conditions that the Coronavirus could easily overwhelm should they have the misfortune to contract it. By making sure that they have received proper risk assessments and been put into the right risk category as well as ensuring that financially they don't lose out on unsocial hour payments or other contractual entitlements.



With the changing advice from the government it has been hard at times, to know what the best advice is to give to members. The wearing of masks in all hospitals areas is but one example, where staff who have respiratory conditions may not be able to wear the masks for hours at a time or when mobilising because they risk becoming hypoxic.

Thankfully the RCN has very quickly adapted our website and now evidence based up to date information is regularly uploaded to the popular COVID19 page. The page [www.rcn.org.uk/covid-19](http://www.rcn.org.uk/covid-19) contains key clinical information and resources for members as well as frequently asked questions and links to mental well-being during these challenging times, government guidance, PPE and advice should you find yourself redeployed.

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## TikTok

The RCN Foundation recently announced a new partnership with social networking service TikTok, who are committed to bring much needed support to thousands of frontline healthcare workers who are fighting to save the lives of those impacted by COVID-19. TikTok has donated £5m to the COVID-19 Healthcare Support Appeal established by the RCN Foundation.

The very generous donation will provide emergency funding to frontline healthcare workers - including nurses, midwives, healthcare support workers, physios, paramedics, cleaners and porters - who are in need of immediate practical support, as well as psychological support both during and after the COVID-19 emergency.

As always, we are steadfast in our commitment to supporting and strengthening nursing. This incredible gift from TikTok will make a real and lasting difference to the nursing and midwifery community and other frontline health care workers in these unprecedented times.



### Branch Meeting 29 June 7.30 - 9pm via online MS Teams

The agenda will focus on:

- Progressing from a pandemic to a new normal
- Updates from RCN London
- Sharing ways on going forward

We will also be joined by the new RCN Director for London, Lisa Elliott.

If you're interested in joining us, **participants must be able to access Microsoft Teams**, you can download the app onto your phone, laptop or computer. Please contact Zoe Jammeh, giving your name, membership number and preferred email address and she will send you joining instructions.

## Dates of meetings plus Useful names & numbers

**Monday 29 June** - Virtual Branch meeting, 7.30- 9pm Look out for link in email to members

**Tuesday 22 September** - Virtual Branch meeting, 7.30- 9pm Look out for link in email to members

### Current Branch Executive:

Chair & Publicity:	Mike Smith
Secretary	Joan Chappell
Treasurer	Gerry Cotter
Recruitment	Joan Chappell
Learning & Development	Sheila Gooljar

### Local RCN Stewards:

Mike Smith (ESH)  
Gerry Cotter (ESH)  
Karen Kilday (ESH\* in training)

### Health & Safety reps

Sheila Gooljar (Independent sector)  
Mike Smith (ESH)  
Gloria Nwajei-Agha (CUH)

### Learning Reps

Jemaima Gubatan - Croydon CCG  
Priya Govender, Community rep

- \* CUH - Croydon University Hospital
- \* ESH - Epsom and St Helier
- \* Community CCG's - covering Merton & Sutton, Surrey Downs

**RCN London Region,**  
5th Floor, 20 Cavendish Square,  
London W1G 0RN  
Tel. 0345 458 6968

**Director of London Region**  
Lisa Elliott

**Raising concerns,** raising standards (Whistleblowing) helpline for RCN members: 0345 772 6300

### RCN Member Support Services

0345 408 4391.

The service offers guidance on benefit entitlement, money advice, counselling and careers.

**RCN Foundation** - bursaries, project grants and help for times of need or hardship - go to [www.rcnfoundation.org.uk](http://www.rcnfoundation.org.uk)  
0207 647 3645

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or our page on the RCN website

[www.rcn.org.uk/london/get-involved/branches/outer-south-west-london](http://www.rcn.org.uk/london/get-involved/branches/outer-south-west-london)

Find pictures, Branch events and news regularly updated. Contact Mike [michael.smith11@nhs.net](mailto:michael.smith11@nhs.net)

