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RCN  
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AUTUMN 2022  
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 **FAIR PAY  
FOR NURSING**



#### ADVICE

10 tips to apply for  
an education grant

#### CLINICAL

Bladder and bowel  
care essentials

#### PEOPLE

Ashton's  
award-winning  
leadership skills

#### CAREER

How to prepare  
for your appraisal



Royal College  
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# VOTE TO STRIKE

HELP FIGHT FOR PATIENT SAFETY AND FAIR PAY  
AS WE LAUNCH OUR BIGGEST EVER STRIKE BALLOT

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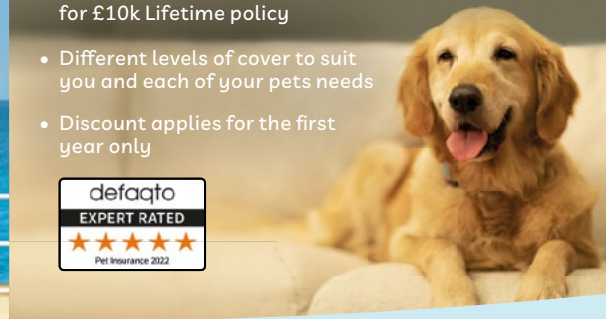


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## Story to tell?

If you've got a story to share, email:  
[health.care@rcn.org.uk](mailto:health.care@rcn.org.uk)

This issue of *RCN Health+Care* went to press on 20 September. Get the latest RCN advice and information: [rcn.org.uk](http://rcn.org.uk)

**Editor:** Sharon Palfrey  
**Production:** Mark Kalaher  
**Design:** Debbie Roberts  
**Published by:** Royal College of Nursing,  
 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN  
**Publication code:** 010 485  
**Cover image:** Neil Hanna

## Making history

RCN Nursing Support Workers' Day on 23 November provides us with a great opportunity to shine a light on our essential work. Find out more about getting involved on page 4.

Right now there are so many reasons for us to speak out about the importance of our roles. This autumn many of us will have a chance to shape nursing history. As the voting papers land in the RCN's biggest ever strike ballot, I'm urging all eligible members working for the NHS and HSC to vote yes.

Strike action is a powerful force for the change our profession so desperately needs and, on page 6, our head of legal tackles the myths circulating around strike action. Get the reassurance you need to stand up for yourselves, your patients and your colleagues.

### Maive Coley

Vice Chair  
 RCN UK Nursing Support Workers Committee



We use the abbreviations **HCA** (health care assistant), and **HCSW** (health care support worker)

throughout this magazine to cover all those in nursing support worker (NSW) roles. Nursing support worker is a term specifically used by the RCN to describe the committee representing HCAs, assistant practitioners, trainee nursing associates, nursing associates and HCSWs.

# Get ready for Nursing Support Workers' Day

On 23 November we'll celebrate your incredible work and the difference you make to the lives of patients, families and carers on RCN Nursing Support Workers' Day.

Following on from the huge success of the day last year, Kevin Morley, Chair of the RCN UK Nursing Support Workers Committee, wants even more people to get involved this year.

He says: "Use the day to shine a spotlight on the importance of our work and the breadth of roles and settings we work in.

"This is an opportunity to get our work better valued, acknowledged and celebrated by our colleagues and the public."

Nursing Support Workers' Day has been held annually since 2020.

To help you celebrate, free RCN materials will be available to order and download from the website from mid-October.

For the first time this year you'll also be able to buy an enamel badge and order free badges from the RCN shop, to show your support for the day: [shop.rcn.org.uk](https://shop.rcn.org.uk)



## Never been involved in events on the day before? Here's some tips for getting started

- **Get others involved.** It should never be down to just one person to organise an event. Get other nursing support workers (NSWs), your learning rep or local RCN office and your workplace communications team involved early.
- **Start planning now.** Not only will you need time to get everything organised, but busy staff might need notice to attend.
- **Get others interested.** Events will be tailored to NSWs but ensure other staff are welcome too.
- **Get your poster up early.** Get the RCN Nursing Support Workers' Day poster up on your noticeboard – your local rep will be able to help you with that.
- **Get social.** Follow our social media channels for the latest updates and use [#NursingSupportWorkersDay](https://twitter.com/NursingSupportWorkersDay) in your social media posts.

Read more: [rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag](https://rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag)

# Vote to strike: what you need to know

As hundreds of thousands of members are urged to vote for strike action, we answer your questions on this historic move



## Why are we calling for strike action?

An NHS pay award has been announced in England and Wales, and an NHS pay offer has been made in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, we're still awaiting a pay announcement for HSC staff. Across the board, it's unacceptable. We've been campaigning for a pay rise of 5% above inflation but all the deals and offers fall far short of that.

A decade of underpayment has left the nursing profession chronically short-staffed and undervalued. This must change. Industrial action is a last resort, but the current staffing crisis is causing an unacceptable risk to patients and nursing staff.

## What's this got to do with nursing support workers?

Everything. Nursing support workers are at the lower end of

pay scales and the soaring cost of living is having a direct impact on you. You deserve to be paid fairly for the important work you do – to make sure you can afford to stay in nursing. The nursing profession needs fair pay to attract new staff into nursing support roles to provide the care patients deserve.

## Who's eligible to vote in the postal ballot opening in October?

RCN members working for NHS and HSC employers on Agenda for Change contracts. This includes bank staff working for NHS employers.

## Why can't I vote online?

By law, we must carry out industrial action ballots by post. With strikes by postal workers affecting mail delivery times, post your ballot paper back as soon as possible so you can be sure your vote is counted before 12 noon on Wednesday 2 November.

## What does strike action involve?

On strike days, members involved wouldn't attend work.

## Where can I find out more?

Visit: [rcn.org.uk/ballotfaqs](https://rcn.org.uk/ballotfaqs) and read the *RCN Industrial Action Handbook*: [rcn.org.uk/iahandbook](https://rcn.org.uk/iahandbook)

Feeling nervous about it? Ease your mind by reading what the RCN's top lawyer has to say on page 6.

“

The failure of governments across the UK to listen has left us with no choice but to advocate for strike action

Pat Cullen,  
RCN General  
Secretary &  
Chief Executive



## ACTION



# Nursing strikes: know the facts

Worried about taking part in strike action? Don't be. RCN Director of Employment Relations and Legal Services Joanne Galbraith-Marten reassures members about the withdrawal of labour

### **Nursing staff are allowed to go on strike**

RCN members took successful, legal strike action in 2019/20. You would be entitled to pursue an unfair dismissal claim if you were dismissed for taking part in protected industrial action.

### **Patient safety will be maintained**

During any RCN industrial action, some nursing staff will continue to work to ensure that life-preserving services are provided. This is commonly known as derogation and will be carefully negotiated with employers before any strike action.

### **Striking is lawful**

The only reason we're contemplating industrial action is because the nursing workforce crisis is now putting patients at risk, and as pay continues to fall behind inflation, this significantly contributes to staff shortages. Our legal and employment relations team will carefully follow the strict rules trade unions must comply with to ensure any strike action is lawful.

### **Standing on a picket line is optional**

Picket lines will be in place on days of strike action, but it is a personal choice whether you participate.

### **Strikes do work**

Strike action is a powerful way to force change. The 2019/20 strike action taken by RCN members in Northern Ireland was successful in achieving pay parity and commitments to safer staffing.

### **We can get enough members to vote to strike**

In England, Scotland and Wales, the legislation states that industrial action ballots must achieve at least a 50% turnout and the majority must vote yes for strike action to be lawful. Our recent indicative ballot of members working for the

NHS in Scotland showed we can surpass these important thresholds – well over 50% turned out to vote, far more than those voting in 2021.

### **Our strike action will not jeopardise nursing associates' NMC registration**

The NMC issued an updated statement on 30 August 2022 confirming that registrants, such as nursing associates (in England), have a right to participate in lawful industrial action. The RCN will never ask members to act outside the NMC Code.

### **Strike benefit is payable from day one of action**

Your employer is entitled to withhold your pay if you take part in strike action and pension contributions won't be made on those days. However, members who participate in strike action and lose pay are entitled to RCN strike benefit of £50 per strike day from the first day of action.

Strike payments aren't taxable earnings, so you'll benefit from the whole amount. Exceptions can also be made for members who would suffer long-term financial loss because they participated in industrial action.

### **The public supports us**

RCN polling has shown the majority of the public support nursing staff taking industrial action and the number of public supporters joining the RCN's campaign has grown significantly. In September a poll showed 64% of the public would support a strike by nursing staff, and 75%

are sympathetic to the position we are in. Our industrial action isn't just about pay, it's also about safe and effective patient care.

### **Paying us fairly is a political choice**

Government spending and income are not independent of one another. When public sector workers' wages are cut, they spend less in the economy overall, harming other businesses. They also pay less tax. It's a political choice to pay nursing staff fairly.

### **You don't need your manager's permission to strike**

You don't need your employer or manager's support to take industrial action. And the ballot is entirely confidential – your employer won't know if or how you have voted.

### **This matters to all of us**

We've always been clear that what governments pay staff in the NHS is an indication of what they believe nursing staff in any setting deserve.

Wherever you work, you deserve and need a pay rise – parity with the NHS is the minimum you should get. We'll continue to support RCN members who work for other employers, to seek appropriate recognition by way of pay and working conditions.



The nursing workforce crisis is now putting patients at risk



[rcn.org.uk/fairpay](https://rcn.org.uk/fairpay)

**FAIR PAY  
FOR NURSING**



# ‘It’s time to strike’

Evan Keir pictured by Neil Hanna

With £50m in our strike fund, the RCN means business. But eligible members must vote to ensure strikes happen, says Evan, Nursing Support Worker Member of RCN Council

For the first time in our history the RCN is asking NHS nursing staff in England, Scotland and Wales to go on strike, alongside HSC nursing staff in Northern Ireland, who took strike action in 2019.

We don’t do this lightly, any industrial action is a last resort, but as workers struggling to afford the basic

necessities of warmth and food we are at last resorts.

This is of even greater importance to nursing support workers, who are not only among the lowest paid in the health service, but are some of the lowest paid in our society.

Many will be concerned about the impact strikes

may have on patients. The RCN will never put patients at risk and every effort will be made to ensure that planned strikes are safe.

Every day the chronic underfunding of our health service puts patients, our friends and family members, at risk. Every year without a meaningful pay award deepens this harm.



If you're eligible to vote in this ballot, it's vitally important you do. I strongly urge you to vote yes to strike action. The RCN is here to support you. Our historic strike fund of £50m is there to support you on the picket line.

Costs are rising, and the winter months are just around the corner. Without adequate pay, many of us will soon be facing far more unpleasant decisions than whether to strike. Many already are. Nursing staff are the most

trusted people in our society. We are also a large group with the power to bring about change, and it's time we used that power.

It's time to strike.  
[rcn.org.uk/fairpay](https://rcn.org.uk/fairpay)

## 'We need to talk about assisted dying'

**People feel a whole host of emotions when talking about assisted dying, and all are valid, says Kevin**



Kevin Morley

As a community health care support worker, I've seen first-hand the importance of having relevant and appropriate support around nursing staff when caring for someone at the end of their life.

Assisted dying is currently illegal in the UK, but the Assisted Dying Bill for England and Wales is moving through the UK parliament and has gone further than any previous legislation on the matter.

Recent parliamentary debates and public petitions demonstrate how relevant this conversation is.

While consultants, GPs and community nurses might be involved in discussions about dying, it's health care support workers who are often at the patient's bedside who might be privy to more emotional and intimate conversations.

A patient might be more likely to initiate talking about their death with someone they have built a relationship with and who has been taking care of them for a considerable amount of time.

We might even have been involved in their care long before their end-of-life journey began.

Under the proposed Assisted Dying Bill, care would be led by a consultant and/or a GP, with support from nursing teams including those employed by voluntary and independent support services, such as Macmillan Cancer Support or Marie Curie.

Often health care support workers are at the centre of collaborative working. We play a critical role in ensuring effective, linked-up conversations within the multidisciplinary team.

Above all else, it's important that there's clear and effective communication about assisted dying at all levels.

Should the bill be passed, conversations relating to assisted dying as an additional choice within end-of-life care pathways may need to be initiated.

As always, these conversations will need to be approached with sensitivity, kindness and compassion and the workforce may need extra support to manage the challenges they may evoke.

Read more: [rcn.org.uk/assisted-dying](https://rcn.org.uk/assisted-dying)

**i** At RCN Congress this year, members voted in favour of asking RCN Council to review our current neutral position on assisted dying.

# Bladder and bowel care

Read up on the essentials as we highlight our e-learning resource

There are an estimated 14 million men, women and children living with bladder problems in the UK, and around 6.5 million adults suffering with bowel issues.

These can be debilitating, embarrassing, and life changing, so we've outlined the basics of some common conditions that every health and social care professional should know.

## Incontinence

Incontinence is when a person has trouble controlling their bladder or bowel. There are several types of urinary incontinence, which often involve urine leaking from the urethra, sudden urges to urinate, and a person's inability to empty a full bladder.

Faecal incontinence has similar symptoms, but affecting the bowel, and includes incidences of a person soiling themselves without realising they needed the toilet.

Health and social care professionals must maintain compassion when treating patients with these issues, and it's important to offer appropriate and sensitive solutions.

Our e-learning resource on bladder and bowel care has specific advice for any health and social care professional looking to boost their knowledge of this condition.

## Infections

The guide also covers common infections, including urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Patients often experience pain or a burning sensation when urinating, waking at night more frequently to pass urine, flu-like symptoms, and needing to urinate more urgently than usual.

UTIs are known to come back after treatment, and this is when stronger

treatments can be prescribed, but antibiotics should be offered only when clinically necessary to help avoid antimicrobial resistance.

The guidance also covers urosepsis and advises readers on how to spot sepsis in adults using an early warning score. Catheter infections are also covered, as are considerations on dipstick testing – known as To Dip or Not to Dip.



## Inflammatory bowel disease

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a term used to describe two conditions: ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

They are both long-term conditions that involve the inflammation of the gut.

Colitis only affects the colon, while Crohn's disease can affect any

part of the digestive system, from the mouth to the anus. Symptoms can include pain, cramps or swelling in the abdomen, recurring or bloody diarrhoea, weight loss and extreme tiredness.

While there is no cure, both conditions can be managed with prescriptions, surgeries and diets.

## Supporting you

Our e-learning resource recognises the vital role nursing staff play in caring for patients with bladder and bowel conditions.

It aims to support RCN members to promote continence and manage incontinence for people with bladder and bowel problems, as well as offering general advice, key information and guidance on bladder and bowel health. It's not only for registered nurses, but also nursing support workers and nursing students.

"With this resource, we aim to support members to promote continence and manage incontinence for people with bladder and bowel problems," says Fiona Le Ber, RCN Bladder and Bowel Forum Chair.

"Previous guidance has been widely used and there are new tools to support decision-making, specific patient needs, dipstick testing, recognising various infections and sepsis. It's so important that this group of patients receive the care they need and deserve, and every health professional they encounter should be able to offer them support."

Access the full resource: [rcn.org.uk/bladder-and-bowel-resource](https://rcn.org.uk/bladder-and-bowel-resource)

Find more information on the RCN Bladder and Bowel Forum:

[rcn.org.uk/bladder-and-bowel-forum](https://rcn.org.uk/bladder-and-bowel-forum)

# 'I like to see potential'

Award-winning Ashton's leadership skills have helped her thrive in her role supervising care assistants

"Meeting new care assistants on their first day when they're often quite nervous, then seeing them a couple of months later relaxed and happily interacting with our residents is wonderful," says Ashton Rea, who works at Parkmanor Oaks Care Home in Northern Ireland.

"It's also great to see the rapport they build with fellow staff – we're like a family here. There's a lot of trust."

Ashton's role as a supervisor involves overseeing the care staff, inducting new starters and supporting their training, and working alongside registered nurses to help ensure staff meet the company's standards. She says leadership comes fairly naturally to her.

"It's something I enjoy," Ashton says. "I'm as hands-on as I can be, making sure I'm around to answer any questions. I like to see the potential in people."

Ashton feels lucky to have been supported by the care home managers to maximise her own skills. "I wouldn't have had the confidence to

get to where I am without their belief in me," she says.

"They've taught me so much. I see the positive changes they've made to residents' lives, and I want to be able to do that too."

## Leading and adapting

Ashton recently won a Health Care Support Worker Award in the RCN Northern Ireland Nurse of the Year Awards 2022. She was commended for her leadership skills, and for her work during some of the darkest days of the pandemic when she provided exceptional care and support to residents and their families.

When a resident died, Ashton washed and dressed them, and with the help of her team, placed the body in a coffin as funeral directors weren't able to do so this at the time. "It was very hard as we had to act as undertakers. Our roles became more fluid, and you did what needed to be done," she says.

"It's a lot mentally to deal with, and it's important to understand that it's OK to

“

We're like family. There's a lot of trust

READ MORE ONLINE

[rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag](https://rcn.org.uk/healthcaremag)

Words by Sophie Goode



Ashton, pictured by  
Marie-Therese Hurson

### Find out more

- Check out our care home journey resource for advice and information on working in care homes: [rcn.org.uk/care-home-journey](https://rcn.org.uk/care-home-journey)
- If you already work in a care home, join our care home network: [rcn.org.uk/care-home-network](https://rcn.org.uk/care-home-network)

feel what you feel. Looking after each other's mental health was at the forefront of everything – it still is. Our bond as a team really strengthened."

Ashton says being an advocate for mental health is a priority for her and that sharing her own experiences can help staff feel more comfortable. "As a supervisor, people need to know that they can confide in you and that if they come to you with a problem, you'll do something about it. We should never shy away from discussions around mental health – it's something we all need to be open about. An important part of my role is monitoring how people are, so we can spot if they need support."

When it comes to helping make sure residents get the best care, staff wellbeing and effective communication are key. "It's also important to praise staff when they do a good job. Saying thank you to people so they feel appreciated and valued."

What advice would Ashton give to someone considering working in a care home?

"Be yourself and give it your all. It's extremely rewarding and it's busy, but there will be lots of laughs," she says.

"It'll be tough some days, but it'll be worth it."

# 10 tips for applying for an RCN Foundation grant

The RCN Foundation awards educational grants to more than 100 people every year. Find out how to apply for funding now

- 1** **Check your course is eligible for funding:** it must be accredited by a UK higher education institution or other approved statutory body and be related to nursing or health care. You'll need to show how the course will help you in your role.
- 2** **Get the dates right:** check the RCN Foundation website ([rcnfoundation.rcn.org.uk](https://rcnfoundation.rcn.org.uk)) for any open grants and closing application dates. This is important as many grants are turned down as the dates for the course fall outside the grant period.
- 3** **Check you're eligible for the grant you're applying for:** nursing support workers can apply for the RCN Foundation Kershaw Grant and, from 23 November, the LV= RCN Foundation Education Grants Programme, funded by LV=. The Professional Bursary Scheme also runs twice a year and will next open in spring 2023.
- 4** **Make sure what you're applying for is covered:** apply for funding for course fees, travel costs, childcare or accommodation relating to the course.
- 5** **Get your references right:** get a reference from your manager if you're applying for a qualification that's degree level or below. For postgraduate and higher qualifications, you'll also need a reference from an academic referee.
- 6** **Apply online:** if you have a disability and find it difficult to complete the online application, contact: [grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk](mailto:grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk)
- 7** **Check you've completed the whole form:** each section has a word limit so don't worry about going over.
- 8** **Ask your employer for funding first:** you'll be asked to justify why you haven't asked your employer for funding, so make sure you ask them first.
- 9** **Only apply for up to the maximum available grant:** if you go over, you'll automatically be declined.
- 10** **Be patient:** allow up to six weeks following the grant closing for the RCN Foundation to get back to you. You can reapply another year if you're unsuccessful the first time.



**Prefer to watch video tips?**

Visit: [tiny.cc/RCNFgrants](https://tiny.cc/RCNFgrants), where you can also start your application.

## 'You must push yourself'

*The RCN Foundation awarded Daniel nearly £5,000 to help with course fees and travel costs. He explains why he applied and the benefits the grant has brought him*

Daniel Ryder had no ambitions to be a registered nurse when he first started working in paediatrics, but after years working as an advanced health care assistant, he found himself wanting to do more.

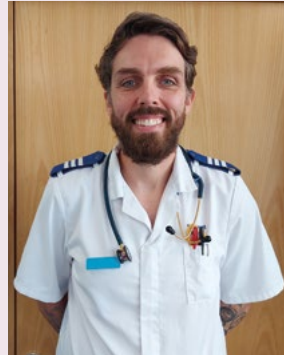
He wanted to study for a level 4 University Certificate in Health and Social Care Practice, so he applied to the RCN Foundation for funding to help him complete the course. His ultimate aim was to get the qualification so he could progress to registered nurse training.

"I didn't find the grant application process complicated at all. The paperwork took a bit of time, of course, but it wasn't difficult," he says. "Making the decision to go back to education wasn't easy and I definitely wouldn't have been able to do it without the grant."

Daniel believes nursing support workers can often feel like they're stuck in their role. "You must push yourself," he says.

# “

## This grant has transformed my life



"As an HCA I didn't think there'd be that support and funding available to help me progress. It's important that people know the RCN Foundation is there to support us to continue

to grow. I'm sure there are others who could put this funding to good use.

"Do what's going to make you happy," he adds. "It's no exaggeration to say this grant has transformed my life. I don't want to have any regrets. I want to be able to look back and say I've done my best; I've done everything I could have."

**Daniel received a Kershaw Grant – an award for nursing support workers who wish to pursue their education in health care.**

## New education grants programme opening soon

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[LV.com/RCN](https://www.lv.com/RCN)

Applications for a new RCN Foundation education grants programme, funded by LV=, open on Nursing Support Workers' Day on 23 November. The

programme will provide education grants for up to 10 nursing support workers across the UK in 2022 and 2023.

## RCN Foundation support



In the RCN Foundation Helping Hand scheme, previously successful grant

recipients support others through the grant application process: [tiny.cc/rcnhelpinghand](https://tiny.cc/rcnhelpinghand)

Read about how to apply for an RCN Foundation Benevolent Fund Grant: [rcn.org.uk/struggling-to-make-ends-meet](https://rcn.org.uk/struggling-to-make-ends-meet)

# How to prepare for your appraisal

The prospect of an appraisal might make you feel nervous, but they're a chance for you to discuss your achievements, challenges and ambitions

## What to think about before your meeting

- How you've performed in your role since your last appraisal.
- What was expected in the last review period and if you've achieved this.
- Any challenges or obstacles that prevented you from meeting your objectives.
- Any local issues or system failures outside your control that have had an impact on your ability to meet the agreed objectives and/or timeframes. This may include unsustainable pressures due to high demand, sickness and/or staff shortages.
- Examples and evidence of the points you're making.
- Ways to demonstrate your competency and/or achievements.
- Specific behavioural competencies that demonstrate excellence. For example, leading and developing others or self-awareness.
- Ways to quantify your outputs or demonstrate patient or client satisfaction.
- Any development or support you may need to help improve your performance or build on your strengths. For example, mentorship or coaching.
- How to articulate how you feel about your role, your personal objectives and aspirations.



Take a look at our tailored resources for professional development:  
[rcn.org.uk/nsws](https://rcn.org.uk/nsws) and get more career advice:  
[rcn.org.uk/your-career](https://rcn.org.uk/your-career)

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[rcn.org.uk/get-help](https://rcn.org.uk/get-help)





## What should happen during the meeting?

- Your manager should listen and acknowledge your views.
- You and your manager should agree objectives, expected outcomes and any support or training you may need to do your job well.
- Time should be set aside for both of you to reflect and analyse any issues raised.
- Achievements should be recognised and encouraged.
- The meeting should end positively with an agreed action plan and the next review meeting date agreed.
- Your line manager should send you the notes of the meeting or you may be asked to complete and sign a standard review or one-to-one form.
- Any mitigating circumstances or contributing factors should be considered, especially if they relate to ill health or disability. You should be made aware of available support where this is appropriate.

Any performance or capability concerns that arise out of your meeting should be addressed in line with your employer's local policies and procedures. Seek support and advice from the RCN where relevant:

[rcn.org.uk/contact-advice](https://rcn.org.uk/contact-advice)



## What shouldn't happen

No disciplinary penalty or sanction should be imposed as a result of issues discussed during your appraisal. If a serious one-off incident has occurred, a separate formal meeting should be arranged under the capability and performance policy.

A poor performance review meeting can feel negative, with the focus on failures or things you haven't achieved. You may leave feeling disengaged or de-motivated. Sometimes, you might find:

- there's no two-way conversation – the line manager controls the meeting
- the meeting ends with disagreement between you and your line manager
- issues or concerns are ignored
- unrealistic or unachievable objectives or timeframes are set
- there's insufficient support, supervision, coaching or re-training offered or available
- there's a failure or refusal to consider or implement any reasonable adjustments requested for those protected under the Equality Act 2010.

You can get RCN support if this happens: [rcn.org.uk/contact-advice](https://rcn.org.uk/contact-advice)

# Empowered and appreciated: how one HCA helped colleagues find joy in work

When nursing support workers know they're appreciated, the whole dynamic of the ward will change for the better, says Tracy

"If health care assistants (HCAs) don't feel appreciated, they're not going to have enthusiasm for their role," says Tracy Snipp, an HCA at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in South London. "Wellbeing does need to be more of a priority."

Around two years ago, Tracy created a quality improvement programme at the hospital, where she's worked for six years, to help HCAs find joy in their work. Working with Catriona Stapleton, Senior Quality Improvement Lead, Tracy put together surveys which asked HCAs 'What matters to you?'

"We asked HCAs what could be improved and what would make them feel better at work," Tracy says. "It was the first time it had been done."

Initially, surveys revealed that only 40% of staff said they found joy in their work. That had to change.

Tracy was led to her role in health care after years spent caring for her mum.

Now, as an HCA, she loves the patient-focused nature of the role. "We know our patients better than most people because we spend so much time at their bedside," she says.

But this wasn't always recognised or taken full advantage of. She began to think of solutions to introduce recognition and involvement.

Tracy placed a Connect 4-style game with red and green counters in the staff room. She asked HCAs to assess their day: "If you had a bad shift put a red one in, if you had a good shift put a green one in. Then write down what made it a good or bad shift."

This served as a visual representation of staff mood, but also helped gather information about what could be improved.

Tracy came up with measures to empower HCAs, such as the right to choose their own break times. One of the most significant changes is the chance to take part



in ward board rounds – discussions about each patient’s journey, during which daily tasks are assigned.

“Before, we weren’t invited to board rounds with the doctors and registered nurses, but because we have the knowledge about how our patients are eating and drinking, bowel movements, etc, registered nurses had to go back and forward all the time between us and the doctors,” Tracy says.

“Now, we’re invited on board rounds every day, so the registered nurses and doctors can

come directly to us to ask about the patient.”

This simple change had a huge impact on morale. “It made us feel part of the team,” Tracy says. “Before, HCAs used to say ‘I’m just a health care assistant’ but now they’re not saying that. We have real input.”

The proportion of staff reporting that they find joy in their work has increased to 90%. Tracy says: “If we’re happy, the patients see that. We feel content, we feel appreciated, rather than feeling: ‘is it really worth it?’”

It’s also empowered HCAs to do tasks independently. Tracy says: “We take initiative now because we feel confident, we’re feeling proud of what we can do.”

On RCN Nursing Support Workers’ Day last year, Tracy was awarded a Cavell Star Award for her leadership of the Joy in Work Quality Improvement project.

“

We take initiative now because we feel confident

Her colleague Catriona told the Cavell Nurses’ Trust: “She has motivated so many HCAs to believe in themselves and make a real difference.”

It was a team effort though, Tracy says, and she thanks her fellow HCAs, plus her manager Leah Rushingwa and head of nursing Ann-Marie Cooley for helping make the project possible.

Tracy’s advice to anyone thinking of following in her footsteps? “Just do it. Speak up and maybe you’ll change things for the better,” Tracy says. “If HCAs are feeling appreciated, and their work being noticed, the whole dynamic of your workplace will change. If they’re underappreciated, they might see it as just a job. But it’s not just a job.

“You need to have confidence to speak up on behalf of your patients. You need to be proud in your job.”

Words by Rachael Healy

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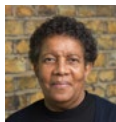
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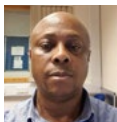
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Email your representative using this format: **name.surname@reps.rcn.org.uk**

### Here for you

The committee reports directly to RCN Council through its dedicated Nursing Support Worker Member of Council and provides a platform for HCAs, HCSWs, TNAs, NAs and APs to influence RCN policy at a UK and local level. Find out more: [rcn.org.uk/nswcommittee](http://rcn.org.uk/nswcommittee)

Nominations will close for the vacant seats in the Eastern and London regions at 4.30pm on Monday 3 October. Find out about these and other elections taking place:

[rcn.org.uk/elections](http://rcn.org.uk/elections)