

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol ar Graffu ar Gynllun y Gaeaf ar gyfer Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol 2021 i 2022 Llywodraeth Cymru](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Health and Social Care Winter Plan 2021 to 2022](#)

WP 06

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol Cymru | Royal College of Nursing Wales

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## **Royal College of Nursing Wales response to the Health, and Social Care Committee's inquiry into the Welsh Government's Winter Plan**

The Royal College of Nursing Wales (RCN Wales) welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee on the Welsh Government's winter plan.

### **Summary**

1. The Welsh Government's winter plan is welcomed by the Royal College of Nursing as a way to address workforce pressures during the winter period, but as the pressures are felt all year round the Welsh Government should develop a detailed long term plan to address these pressures.
2. A key aspect of the winter plan is to ensure the success of the vaccination programme. There needs to be a recognition of the pressure this is adding to the existing workforce and resources need to be made available to facilitate and support the programme.
3. Infection prevention and control is vital to the health of the public and the workforce. The Welsh Government must ensure the workforce is provided with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for the area they are working in, along with adequate ventilation.

### **Introduction**

What's become to be known as winter pressures do not merely occur in 'winter', rather they are pressures that are seen all year round. Pressures including; workforce shortages, difficulty maintaining staffing levels, providing care in care homes and communities with a shortage of district nurses and care home nurses, difficulties relating to hospital discharge and addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. These occur all year round. However the Royal College of Nursing does acknowledge these pressures are extenuated during the winter period as a result of the increase of communicable illnesses.

The Welsh Government Winter Plan for Health and Social Care 2021-22 is welcomed by the Royal College of Nursing Wales as a means of addressing the pressures facing health and care services during this difficult period. However, the pressures listed above challenge the workforce all year round. The Welsh Government should ensure the work to address these pressures does not end with winter and rather continues throughout the year.

### **Vaccination Programme**

The Welsh Government's winter plan expresses the importance of the vaccination programme. The winter plan was developed before the booster vaccination became available, but the importance of the vaccination programme is emphasised.

The Royal College of Nursing agrees that the vaccination programme is crucial to protecting the public. Nursing staff are the driving force behind the delivery of the vaccination programme. Many nurses retired and returned to practice to support colleagues and offered their support to many services including the vaccination programme. This provided temporary relief for the permeant workforce. However goodwill will only go so far. These nurses will soon, if not already, retire again and without actively seeking to keep their experience and skill within the NHS, Wales will once again lose these nurses. This will challenge the continuation of the vaccination programme. With a reduction in nurses comes a reduction of capacity and consequently not as many vaccinations can be delivered.

On the 14 December Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Care announced that all available clinical staff in Wales would be redeployed to vaccination centres to massively accelerate the delivery of the COVID-19 booster jab. The redeployment of staff, while vitally important, only diverts resources from one crucial area to another.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic nursing staff were redeployed to support colleagues tackling the pandemic, this included redeploying school nurses and health visitors. To ensure appropriate safeguarding, vital services such as school nurses and health visitors should not be redeployed.

The Welsh Government must ensure steps are taken to limit the impact of the redeployment of staff on vital services and slow the spread of COVID-19 to protect services, staff and the public.

### **Infection, prevention and control (IPC)**

An essential aspect of IPC is access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). However this is not mentioned in great detail within the winter plan. To add to this ventilation is not mentioned at all within the winter plan.

The NHS estate is in need of investment. In September 2019 it was reported that NHS building needed £261m worth of work on problems deemed to pose a high or significant risk. There is also a combined total of £560m maintenance backlog.<sup>1</sup> To add to this the

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<sup>1</sup> [NHS hospitals and buildings' £261m backlog of urgent repairs - BBC News](#)

ventilation systems of many NHS buildings need updating due to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and air-borne illnesses. Many NHS buildings have closed ventilation systems or windows that cannot be opened. Proper ventilation is key to reducing the transmissibility of COVID-19 and other air-borne illnesses. A long-term plan should be put in place to evaluate the needs of the NHS estate and the timescale it would take to ensure every NHS building has effective ventilation.

In addition to effective ventilation, ensuring health and social care workforce receive adequate PPE for the area they are working in is essential. The Royal College of Nursing Wales and British Medical Association Cymru jointly wrote to the Health and Social Care Minister to express this importance.

In addition, the Royal College of Nursing together with several external stakeholders has developed an online IPC risk assessment toolkit to be hosted on the RCN website.<sup>2</sup> The toolkit was developed to provide guidance to mitigate the airborne route of transmission which is recognised as posing a significant risk to healthcare workers when working within 2 meters of a person known or suspected to have COVID-19.

The toolkit is designed to bridge the current gap between the current UK IPC guidance, relevant Health and Safety legislation and employment law by helping to support RCN members in all care settings and roles to understand the legal responsibilities of employers and managers and their rights to practise within a safe working environment. The toolkit aims to clarify the process of assessing and managing risk posed by airborne respiratory infections such as COVID-19 and is specifically aimed at the health and care workforce.

The Welsh Government and employers must ensure the safety of their staff, the Royal College of Nursing's risk assessment tool will greatly aid their ability to do so.

In addition, the importance of IPC nurses did not resonate within the winter plan. IPC nurses promote the safety of the patient, the public and the healthcare worker. The role is multifaceted, but the most familiar functions of an IPC nurse is to provide specialist advice and enable the workforce, through education, to carry out surveillance and the development of policies and guidance.

Investing in IPC nurse consultants would ensure Wales has the resources available to provide expert knowledge across systems; it would also ensure that Wales has the resources available to educate the next generation of the workforce in IPC. IPC consultant posts could also facilitate the sharing of expertise at a senior level across national boundaries. This would elevate the status of IPC nursing and the Welsh contribution to it. Every local health board must employ a consultant IPC nurse and build succession planning into their Integrated Medium Term Plans.

## **Workforce**

One of the key aspects of the winter plan is to support our health and social care workforce. This is welcomed by the Royal College of Nursing, but the key regarding the workforce lack detail and are not considered in the wider context. For example, the Royal

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<sup>2</sup> [COVID-19 workplace risk assessment toolkit | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](https://www.rcn.org.uk/COVID-19-workplace-risk-assessment-toolkit)

College of Nursing welcomes the action to ensure workforce plans for the health sector do not have a negative impact on the supply of the workforce in social care by considering joint plans for recruitment and flexible deployment. This action, despite lacking detail is noteworthy and should be expanded on beyond the winter period. Social care recruitment and retention is a chronic challenge and many nursing staff leave social care for the NHS as a result of better pay, terms and conditions. To help reduce this, it is necessary to ensure social care is an attractive area of nursing, a long term joint recruitment and flexible deployment plan could considerably improve the staffing shortages within the social care sector.

Another action in the winter plan is to continue 'to focus on the wellbeing of our workforce and supporting their physical and mental health'. While the ambition of this action is admirable, there is no information on how this will be done, who's responsible for this or what is expected from health boards and trusts. Furthermore the plan emphasises the use of a workforce wellbeing tool to signpost individuals to resources available for them, but the link for the tool is missing in the winter plan document.

In a recent RCN survey (2021) 59% of Welsh respondents expressed that they are considering leaving or planning on leaving the profession. When asked for the reasons as to why they want to leave nursing (tick all that apply), 69% said they felt undervalued, 58% said they were exhausted and 40% said it was due to their stress levels. A simple wellbeing toolkit is not sufficient in addressing the causes of poor wellbeing within the workforce.

In the 2021 RCN employment survey, 73.5% of Welsh members reported working additional hours every week. The most common response when asked how many additional hours do they work every week was 3-6. The survey was previously run in 2019 at which point the most common answer for how many additional hours do you work every week was 1-4. The rise in the number of additional hours nursing staff are working is troubling.

This demonstrates the extent to which the nursing workforce are under pressure and burning out. The continued rise of those considering leaving the profession in recent years, combined with the rise in number of additional hours worked every week is deeply concerning.

To address this it is important that the Welsh Government consider the pressures facing the workforce in a wider context and establish a nursing retention plan. This must include improving access to continued professional development, ability to work flexibly and increased pay.

The Royal College of Nursing Wales would welcome a long term detailed plan to tackle workforce pressures. This should include a nursing retention plan and a post-registration commissioning strategy.

### **About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)**

The RCN is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union of nurses, representing around 435,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, healthcare support workers and nursing students, including over 27,000 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.