

Committing to the safe rebuilding of health and social care services



The leadership and professionalism shown by nursing staff during the COVID-19 pandemic is testament to their commitment to patient safety.

The nursing profession has been at the fore of the response to the pandemic, leading innovation and quality of treatment and care. Nurses, in all setting and sectors across health and social care, deserve to know that their safety and wellbeing is paramount to the UK Government, devolved administrations and health agencies in return. Nurses at all levels should be fully engaged in all transformation linked to rebuilding services post-COVID-19.

The RCN is calling on all UK governments, relevant agencies and employers to commit to the following:

1. Full and proper risk assessments to control the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and that all identified risks are acted on. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure staff are protected, which includes timely access to testing. Risk assessments must be reviewed regularly or following any incident or change in circumstances. No staff must be pressured to return to work when their individual risk assessment says otherwise.
2. The increased risk faced by Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) nursing staff must be considered in all actions and undertakings as services return. Further, employers and governments must tackle the underlying causes which have contributed to worse outcomes for BAME staff.
3. Capture and act on lessons learned during the pandemic in relation to raising concerns about personal protective equipment (PPE), equipment and staffing. Ensuring clear and accountable mechanisms are in place for staff to raise any concerns safely, in the knowledge that they will be dealt with fairly and without fear of redress. Staff must not be required or pressurised into working without the correct PPE for their environment
4. Proper management and support for the health and wellbeing of nursing staff. This includes enabling staff to take breaks at work, their annual leave, and by reviewing and controlling working patterns to prevent long shifts or excess hours being worked.
5. A particular commitment for all employers to make available and fund timely access to confidential counselling and psychological support for all staff. Staff must be able to self-refer to these services.
6. Nurses in all sectors must lead the way in ensuring nursing staff can return to their substantive roles and service areas as soon as it is safe to do so.
7. Nurse leaders in all sectors must be given the authority and resources to transform, reopen and rebuild services safely. In doing so nurse leaders must be able to future proof the infection control and critical care capabilities and capacity achieved during the past 100 days. This must be done with consultation and the support of the RCN.
8. Recognising the particular contribution of all nursing students during the pandemic, a clear pathway is needed that allows nursing students to return to normal study as soon as possible and those from the current cohort to register in their original timeline.