


Frontline First  
Congress 2011 Update

**Introduction**

The NHS is facing one of the most significant financial challenges in its history with the need to secure £20 billion of cash releasing efficiency savings by 2014/15. The NHS Chief Executive, Sir David Nicholson, has set the NHS the target of achieving efficiency gains of four per cent per annum (now increasingly known as the "Nicholson Challenge") over the next four years. The quality, innovation, productivity





that there are likely to be more NHS trusts that are reducing their nursing and clinical workforce, however, trusts are rarely being transparent in their consultation documents, board papers and media releases.

Many trusts have said that it is their intention to minimise the number of compulsory redundancies and instead will lose posts through natural wastage i.e. non replacement of staff when they retire or leave. In addition many organisations have introduced stricter controls in terms of their recruitment processes which may include freezing or deleting vacant posts. Therefore, whilst the number of compulsory redundancies may be relatively small these other measures can result in a significant net loss to the workforce. This has implications for patient care and the workload of those staff that remain in post. In addition the loss of skills and experience has implications for both the current skill mix and the ability to deliver new models of care in the future.

Out of the 21 NHS Trusts listed in Appendix 1, below are some examples of trusts that are reducing nursing and clinical workforce. The data has been obtained from RCN's Frontline First intelligence and False Economy Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

- x **Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust** has a £20 million reduction in their contract with NHS South West Essex for 2011/12. They will be reducing 218 posts from their establishment, out of which 107 posts are nurses and midwives.
- x **County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust** is undertaking a £60m cost cutting exercise by 2014. The trust is proposing to reduce 300 nursing posts through natural wastage.
- x **Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust** needs to deliver an £8 million surplus by 2010/11. Currently 149 whole time equivalent (WTE) posts are under review for potential losses, 61 WTE are clinical.
- x **Barts and the London NHS Foundation Trust** is consulting with staff on their workforce proposals and expects to reduce their nursing workforce by 258 WTE (a £11.3m savings). Total workforce cuts amount to 635 WTE posts.
- x **University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust** has a savings target of £108 million over the next five years. The trust proposes to reduce 1,348 WTE posts by 2015, out of which 688 WTE are from its nursing and midwifery workforce. T e rmkin by 2nt



## Themes and emerging trends

### 1. Substitutions and dilutions of the nursing workforce

Increasingly, NHS trusts are reassessing nursing roles to deliver short-term reductions in the wage bill without a full clinical assessment of the impact of these actions on the quality of patient care. This includes down banding, replacing registered nurses with unregistered nursing assistants and re-deploying highly skilled and higher-paid specialist nurses to work on regular wards to cover staff shortages.

The examples identified by the RCN are as follows:

- x **Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust** has a cost improvement programme target of £6.6 million for 2011/12. The trust plans to reduce 65 Band 6 posts and increase 48 Band 5 posts, mainly within the neonatal nursing structure
- x **Southern Health (Hampshire Partnership Foundation Trust)** is consulting on changes to its clinical skill mix within the Learning Disability Directorate. The trust is reducing substantive Band 6 and 7 nurses and increasing Band 5 nursing posts
- x **Royal Cornwall Hospital NHS Trust** is proposing a trust-wide restructuring of its senior nursing and midwifery workforce. Approximately 100 Band 7 and above (matrons, ward sisters, charge nurses and team leaders) will undergo job assessments, with risk of redeployment if they do not fit within the 'newly defined posts in the management structure.' There has been no consultation with staff or trade unions
- x **Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust** proposes to change the nursing skill mix in a learning disability assessment inpatient service by reducing Band 5 nurses and Band 3 health care assistants and increasing Band 2 health care assistant staff.

Nurses have continued to voice concerns through the RCN's Frontline First campaign on down-banding exercises within trusts. Two examples of comments received from nurses are listed below:

'Each department had to undergo a workforce review. This is looking at frontline nurses. Posts that are being questioned in my department are Band 7 matrons, specialist nurses who are directly involved in patient care, and Band 3 HCAs.<sup>8</sup> No other profession is being examined at present, only nursing.'

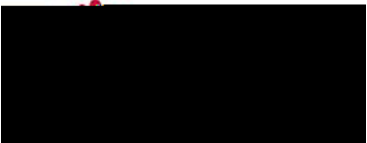
'Skill mix persistently being diluted in Minor Injuries Unit to the extent that nurse led services now being delivered for significant periods by Band 5 nurses.'

### 2. Natural wastage

There are an increasing number of posts being effectively removed from the NHS through a process of 'natural wastage'. This is where clinical and nursing posts are deleted after staff members retire, are re-deployed or leave the trust. The impact of

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<sup>8</sup> Health care assistant (HCA) is a member of the nursing team but not regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)



natural wastage results in there being less staff on the ground to work within hospital wards, community based clinics etc. This clearly has an impact on the workload and





Below is an example of a trust that is reducing its number of beds without consulting staff and assessing the impact that these closures will have on patient care.

Some significant emerging themes are:

1. Cuts not re-provision – Many NHS trusts are looking to reduce services within acute settings and seeking to re-provide these services elsewhere, particularly within community settings. However, in a significant number of areas there is no clear evidence that these services are being re-provided elsewhere. This could lead to a 'transition gap' where patients do not have access to vital care during the period between services being closed and their re-provision in the future.

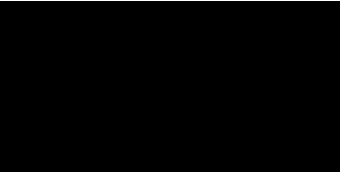
2. Preventative services – Nurses play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of disease for patients. In particular specialist community based nurses have been placed at the forefront of taking a lead role in the coordination and delivery of more responsive services for individuals with long-term conditions. The aim of prevention must be to reduce the amount of care that patients require from the NHS, which in turn reduces the overall cost to the NHS. However, the RCN is concerned that a number of the examples of cuts to services identified above relate to the prevention of illness.

The RCN believes that when trusts are planning reductions or changes to NHS



### Appendix 1- Breakdown of workforce cuts - 21 NHS Trusts

Strategic Health Authority	NHS Organisations	Total workforce cuts identified by NHS Trusts	Total nursing posts (RN,HCA) to be lost	Other clinical posts (i.e. medical, dental scientific, technical, therapeutic)
London SHA	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	149	61 (nursing and clinical)	







## Summary of Appendix

The RCN has analysed figures from **21 NHS Trusts** that have provided a detailed breakdown on job specific workforce cuts.

Within these 21 trusts, **there are 9,650 posts identified to be lost**. Of these, **4,429 posts are nursing** (registered nurses and health care assistants). **Nursing posts account for 46 per cent of the total workforce cuts.**

The number of **clinical posts** (nursing, doctors, consultants, scientific, technical, therapeutic, midwives and health visitors) **to be lost is 5,209 posts. This is 54 per cent of the total workforce cuts.**

**On average, 12 per cent of qualified nursing jobs will be lost across the trusts' established nursing workforce.**

The figures used in this report are the most up-to-date provided for the 21 NHS trusts listed. Some Trusts are seeking to develop new models of care provision and alternative forms of efficiency savings which may in turn lead to reductions in their forecasted cuts to workforce numbers. However the RCN is neither aware of nor has received any formal notification of a downward revision of the workforce reductions within these 21 Trusts.

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