

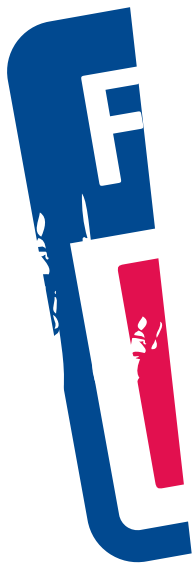


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Frontline First

November update



Change in the NHS workforce since the Coalition Government came into power

The NHS Information Centre produces monthly workforce figures for hospital and community health services (excluding general practice) going back to September 2009, with the July 2012 figures being most recently published. These figures show that the total NHS workforce has already decreased by 20,790 full time equivalents (FTE) (28,521 headcount) since the Coalition Government came into power in May 2010 (NHS Information Centre, 2012a). It could be assumed that these cuts are spread evenly across the workforce, but a closer look reveals that not all staff groups have been affected in the same way.

Figure 1 and table 1 show the percentage change in the FTE numbers for different staff groups since May 2010. A negative percentage change represents a decrease

in numbers; a positive one represents an increase. The workforce is split into the categories used by the NHS Information Centre, which include:

- doctors – made up

The graph in figure 1 shows that over the period, staff working in infrastructure support (often referred to as “back office” positions) have been hit the hardest. However, it also shows that nurse and support staff numbers have fallen generally in line with the average for the NHS workforce, while doctors and qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff have increased. This shows that nursing is not being protected in the same way as some other clinical professions.

Since May 2010 there has been a loss of 5,216 FTE (6,588 headcount) qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (1.68%). If we look at this in more detail, it can be seen that while the number of midwives has gone up by 943 FTE (4.68%) over this period, the number of qualified nurses decreased by 6,147 FTE (2.18%). Despite the Coalition Government’s aim to increase numbers of health visitors by 4,200 by 2015 (DH, 2012a), to date numbers have remained about the same, with a loss of 12 FTE.

The total number of doctors has increased by 7,286 FTE, which is an increase of 7.46%. This includes a rapid increase of over 4,000 FTE between June and July 2012, which the RCN understands is caused by a new shadowing period for trainee doctors. If the “other doctors in training” sub-category is removed from the figures, there is still an increase of 3,024 FTE, or by 3.61% over the period.

The qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical category is very broad, and it must be noted that while overall numbers went up, some individual professions may have decreased. Although the monthly figures are not broken down into a lot of detail, they do show that the number of speech and language therapists and health care scientists went down over this period.

Figures 2 and 3 compare the monthly figures for nursing and doctors since September 2009, and are almost mirror images of each other.

dementia in the UK could increase from 700,000 in 2007, to 940,000 in 2021, and to 1.7 million in 2051, a 154% increase (Knapp and Prince, 2007).

Meeting these rising demands

However, the latest official statistics show that the nursing workforce has not shifted from the acute to the community sector in the last ten years to help meet this significant challenge, as figure 5

shows. The actual number of nurses in the acute, elderly and general sector went up by 28,749 FTE from 2001 to 2011, while the community services sector increased by only 4,736 FTE

While the percentage of nurses working in community services has increased by 0.62 from 2001 to 2011, the number of district nurses – experienced and highly skilled community nurses who provide care in people’s homes – went down by 3,590 FTE (34%) from 2001 to 2011 (NHS Information Centre 2012b). District nurses can be vulnerable to cuts by organisations desperate to save money because they are individually more expensive than less experienced staff, but they actually save the NHS money by using their expertise to keep people out of hospital. The RCN believes that the time has come for Government to give district nursing the

Conclusion

The RCN believes that the NHS is sleepwalking into a nursing crisis in England that is drawing closer as the size of the cuts increase. If the Government continues on its current path it will find itself stranded in a perfect storm of an ageing population with increasing health care demands, but without the adequate nursing workforce to deal with it.

In light of these dangers, it is crucial that the Government takes stock at this halfway point and address these issues now. The RCN believe that we have a real opportunity with the formation of Health Education England to take a long-term approach to workforce planning and secure the future supply of nursing staff.

The RCN calls on the Government to take action and prevent NHS trusts across England from continuing with this damaging agenda of cuts that impact on patient care. We must protect the crucial role of nursing for the future – if not today, then tomorrow may be too late.

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