

oy C ege

Staffing for Safe and Effective Care

# A Health and Safety Representative's Resource







# 1 Introduction

Staffing for safe and effective care is a key campaign priority for the Royal College of Nursing (RCN). Safe staffing means having enough nursing staff with the right skills and knowledge, in the right place, at the right time.

The RCN is campaigning for a specific law on safe staffing across all the countries that make up the UK. Such a law needs to be clear on roles and responsibilities and

## 2 How to use this guide

This guidance provides a framework for identifying key health and safety issues linked to staffing levels which may affect members. You can use the resource in a proactive or reactive way as outlined below. Whilst it doesn't pick up on specific patient safety issues, by addressing issues affecting members, health and safety representatives will be creating a safer environment for all.

### Proactive

You can carry out a proactive workplace inspection every three months. Use the health and safety issues in the framework on pages [7-27](#) as a focus of your inspection activity and make notes in the sections where you identify issues. Use the template in [Appendix 1](#) to collate those concerns and send onto the appropriate manager using the form in [Appendix 2](#).

### Reactive

A member, or an RCN steward or learning rep, may come to you with a safety concern relating to one or more of the issues detailed in the framework on pages [7-27](#).

A member may have come to you following an accident or incident.

A member may have come to you with a generic concern around unsafe staffing levels.

Following any of these concerns, you can carry out a workplace inspection using all or specific parts of the framework. For example, if the health and safety issue is about moving and handling use the specific section to do a themed inspection on moving and handling; if the issue is following an assault to a member use the violence and/or lone working section; if it is a generic concern around safety, use the whole framework.

An inspection, be it proactive or reactive, presents a good opportunity to speak to members working in different areas and get their view on the working environment and the impact of unsafe staffing.

If you are unclear on how to use this resource you can contact your RCN senior officer/officer for support.



## Represent members' concerns

If a member, or members, come to you with a safety concern you can investigate this further. As well as speaking to them, you can also carry out a workplace inspection of the area/issues they have concerns about. You can represent their concerns by raising them with managers, health and safety leads and/or at the health and safety committee.

Under the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979, your employer has a duty to ensure that you are able to carry out these functions and activities.

Of course all this activity takes time, and the regulations allow health and safety representatives to take time off "as is necessary" to carry out their role and functions.

We understand that this can be a challenge, but these functions are essential for the health and safety of the workforce.

# 4 The framework



## 4.1 Issue: Work-related stress

## Inspection of documents and provision of information







### **Incident reporting**

- Encourage members to report all incidents of violence and aggression.
- Discuss with managers the importance of allowing members to report incidents.

### **Inspection of documents and provision of information**

- Ask for incident data on violence and aggression to identify hot spots and whether this correlates to areas of low staffing.
- Check records of mandatory training for violence and aggression related training – are all staff up to date with violence and aggression related training including that on restrictive interventions?
- Look at staff survey data to identify problem areas/hotspots.

### **Incident investigation**

- Get invt3 (a)75nTjEMTw 82.m(t)MC 1.28r mttittttieport intit ion

## 4.4 Issue: Moving and handling

### Incident reporting

- Encourage members to report incidents of back and musculoskeletal injuries using internal reporting mechanisms.
- Encourage members to report near misses or unsafe working conditions related to moving and handling activities using internal reporting mechanisms.

### Incident investigation

- Get involved in investigations of moving and handling incidents involving members and ensure that staffing levels are considered when looking at the cause of the incident.

### Inspection of documents and provision of information

- Ask for data on anonymised sickness absence relating to musculoskeletal disorders. Identify hotspots.
- Look at staff survey results on musculoskeletal disorders in your organisation and identify hotspots.
- Do hotspots correlate with areas of staffing shortages?
- Check records of mandatory training for moving and handling – are all staff up to date with their moving and handling training?

### Work with other reps

Work with your RCN learning rep around access to mandatory training.

Work with your RCN steward around any formal sickness absence review cases relating to musculoskeletal injuries at work. Could there be patterns and trends to these cases?







### **Incident reporting**

- Encourage members to formally report missed breaks as a safety issue (for example, as a tally at the end of a stretch of shifts). Discuss with managers the importance of allowing members to report missed breaks.

### **Inspection of documents and provision of information**

- Ask for anonymised incident report data on missed breaks.
-

## 4.6 Issue: Slips, trips and falls



### Incident investigations

- Get involved in investigations of safety incidents involving lone working nursing staff and ensure that staffing levels are considered when looking at the contributory factors.

### Working with others

- Work with RCN stewards on an individual case basis to see if there are any issues involving lone workers, for example, failure to carry out reasonable adjustments or sickness absence reviews following an assault to a lone worker.



### Further reading

Your organisation's policy on working alone/lone working/personal safety at work.

RCN Safety Representative's Handbook chapter 16 available at:

Labour Research Department Health and Safety Law Handbook, Chapter 8 available at: [rcn.libguides.com/c.php?g=703175&p=5058211](http://rcn.libguides.com/c.php?g=703175&p=5058211)

RCN lone working guidance available at: [rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005730](http://rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005730)

Health and Safety Executive guidance on lone working available at: [hse.gov.uk/lone-working](http://hse.gov.uk/lone-working) and [hseni.gov.uk/articles/lone-working](http://hseni.gov.uk/articles/lone-working) (Northern Ireland)

## 4.8 Issue: Fire safety



### **Relationship with SSEC**



## 4.9 Issue: Road traffic incidents







## 4.10 Issue: Exposure incidents (biological and chemical alerts)



## Incident reporting

.

## 5 What to do if you have identified health and safety issues

### Evidence of an issue

Gather your evidence that there are health and safety issues that may be related to unsafe staffing levels. This may be data on incidents or sickness absence, or the results of your inspection of the working environment and associated risk assessments.

### Let the local manager know

Use the letter template in Appendix 3 to present the evidence to the manager. If you have carried out a safety inspection - 13.4 61.3 (h)-8.6f yrieb 10101010tieear - (e)-1-19 (p)-10.6 (l)-4.5 (a)2.6 (t)12.7 (e i)-5.4(r - (e)

# Appendix 1: Health and safety representative's report form

## Appendix 2: Sample inspection report to employer

### Health and safety representative report form

Form to be used for notifying the employer's representative of unhealthy or unsafe conditions and working practices or unsatisfactory arrangements for welfare at work.

One copy should be retained by the RCN health and safety representative(s) and two copies given to the employer's representative, one of which should be returned to you completed.

Area or workplace inspected:	
Date of inspection:	
Name(s) of safety officer or management's representative for the area or workplace:	
Name of health and safety representative(s) taking part in inspection:	

This record does not imply that the conditions are safe and healthy or that the arrangements for welfare at work are satisfactory.

Signature(s) of health and safety representative(s)

---



---



---

Signature(s) of safety officer or management representative

---



---



---

Date

---



# Appendix 3: Health and safety representative's report form

Area or workplace inspected	Date of inspection
-----------------------------	--------------------

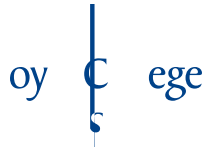
Notification to the employer (or their representative) of conditions and working practices considered to be unsafe or unhealthy and of arrangements for welfare at work considered to be unsatisfactory.

			<i>This column to be completed by the employer.</i>
Date and time of inspection or matter observed	Particulars of matter(s) notified to employer or his representative (include location where appropriate)	Name(s) of health and safety representative(s) notifying matter(s) to employer (or their representative)	Remedial action taken (with date) or explanation, if not taken. This information to be relayed to the safety representative(s)

(This record does not imply that the conditions are safe and healthy or that the arrangements for welfare at work are satisfactory.)

Signature(s) of health and safety representative(s)	Date
Signature(s) of health and safety representative(s)	Date

# Appendix 4: Template letter



## Template Letter

Dear {INSERT NAME OF MANAGER RESPONSIBLE}

On {INSERT DATE} nursing staff made me aware of a health and safety issue at {INSERT LOCATION}

{INSERT DETAILS OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE/S for example how it is affecting members; the potential for it to cause harm; the risks}

I respectfully ask you to address the issue to prevent nursing staff and others being harmed by the conditions at {INSERT LOCATION}.

I look forward to hearing from you by {INSERT DATE 14 days from date of letter} on the actions that are being taken to address these issues.

Yours sincerely

{INSERT NAME}

RCN Health and Safety Representative

cc. {INSERT NAME OF HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGER AND COPY LETTER TO THEM}



