



Rt Hon Steve Barclay, MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
by e mail

17 February 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you on behalf of the University Hospital Association (UHA) Chief Nursing Officers Group, an organisation made up of 46 member Trusts representing a broad range of voices within healthcare. We wish to outline our view on the overall impact of the recent industrial action and to ask that some form of resolution is found to avoid future strikes. This would prevent the risk of further harm to patients, disruption to the operational running of our hospitals, moral injury to our staff and the denigration of the future of nursing as a profession.

We are cognisant that the nature of any strike is meant to be disruptive and whilst the strikes have been well managed by our nursing leaders, the extent of the impact seems not to have been fully understood. Where strikes have occurred, Trusts have had to cancel elective surgery, diagnostic activity and outpatient activity. We know that any increase to patient waiting lists leads to delayed treatment and patient harm. There is also the likelihood of psychological harm for those patients whose appointments or operations were cancelled.

A significant amount of planning has been needed in the weeks leading up to the industrial action which took senior nurse leadership time away from supporting the operational running of our hospitals.

There are currently circa 47, 000 RN vacancies in England (RCN); over 1m healthcare workers worldwide (WHO) and nearly 35,000 nurses left active service last year. Therefore, it is imperative that we attract and retain sufficient nurses to meet future demand. Predictions such as those from the Health Foundation (Jan 2022) estimate the NHS will need almost

19,000 more nurses to tackle to COVID backlog alone. The International Council of Nurses (2022) predicts an increased demand for RNs over the next decade which equates to just under 50% of current numbers worldwide (International Council of Nurses 2022). In 2023 UCAS has seen student nurse applications drop by 27% from the previous year. Attracting and retaining nurses is not only through their pay and conditions but also through the value that we place on them as a society, their well-being, and their professional development.

As chief nurses we are proud of nursing; nursing is a safety critical profession and nurses touch people's lives at their most vulnerable moments. We have seen our nurses care throughout the pandemic, care through one of the most challenging winters and are only too aware of the toll that this has had on their resilience. We know too that what nurses do is valued by the public and we want to keep it as the fulfilling profession it is.

If the industrial action continues, then the issues outlined above will also continue to erode nursing and services provided by the NHS. We are also extremely concerned, as Executive Directors responsible for patient safety, that the plans to escalate the next round of strikes will have an even greater impact than they have already had on patients.

If you would like to meet with a small group of us to hear first-hand of our experience and that of our staff, we should be more than happy to do that.

Yours sincerely

Gail Byrne  
Chief Nursing Officer, University Hospitals Southampton Foundation Trust

Sam Foster  
Chief Nursing Officer  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Liz Rix, Chief Nurse  
Portsmouth University Hospitals

Professor Nancy Fontaine | Chief Nurse & DIPC  
Norfolk & Norwich University Hospitals Foundation Trust

Nathan Askew, Chief Nursing Officer and AHP/HCP Lead  
Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust

Caroline Alexander Chief Nurse  
Barts Health NHS Trust

Prof. Deirdre Fowler, Chief Nurse and Midwife  
University Hospitals Bristol and Weston Foundation Trust

Ann-Marie Riley  
University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust

Professor Cheryl Lenney, OBE, Chief Nurse  
Manchester University Foundation Trust

Professor Janelle Yorke, Executive Chief Nurse & Director of Quality  
The Christie NHS Foundation Trust

Mairead Griffin, Chief Nurse  
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust

Michelle Rhodes, Chief Nurse  
Nottingham University Hospitals

Vanessa Sweeney, Acting Chief Nurse  
University College London Hospital

Lisa Knight MBE  
Chief Nurse, London North West University Healthcare

Vanessa Smith  
Chief Nurse, South London and Maudsley

cc. Will Quince, Minister for Workforce  
Ruth May, Chief Nursing Officer, England  
Mathew Taylor, Chief Executive, NHS Confederation  
Julian Hartley, Chief Executive, NHS Providers  
Danny Mortimer, Chief Executive, NHS Employers