

# The value of nursing

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I've said this before and I hope that I will be saying it for a long time to come – being a registered nurse is great. I have been given many amazing opportunities over the past 28 years and I hope that these opportunities continue in years to come. I know that, whether through direct clinical care, leadership or education, I have helped numerous individuals and their families, contributing to changing things for the better in the NHS, our society and maybe even the world.

I am not alone in these sentiments. The nursing profession remains of national importance and year on year the public tell us that we are and remain the most trusted professionals (Ipsos, 2023). Being able to make statements like this makes me proud to be part of our nursing community and I want to share this pride widely. Valuing ourselves as registered nurses, recognising our contribution and celebrating this is important and I'm not sure we always do this enough.

International Nurses Day (IND) 2024, which lands on Sunday 12 May, is a great opportunity for us to celebrate our value, from our core nursing values that make a difference every day, to how much nursing has evolved and advanced and continues to do so. The theme around IND 2024 is set by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and this year carries the slogan 'Our Nurses. Our Future. The economic power of care'. ICN recognises the financial constraints that nursing often finds itself in and the importance of investment in nursing not only for the profession but also society as a whole.

High-quality nursing comes at a price, whether that be the personal and emotional price of nursing that many of us pay every day, or the financial price within our healthcare system to train, educate, retain and upskill our nursing workforce. I think it's fair to say that good nursing costs. Financial constraints within the NHS are never far from the news these days. Most recently the focus has been on our medical colleagues with ongoing junior doctor strikes, consultant strikes

and recent proposals about GPs mandating potential strike action.

Investment in nursing is a tricky area to tackle. How can we possibly put a price on the skill it takes to provide the expert work that we do as registered nurses? I don't think I can tell you how much the provision of expert end of life care is worth, how much advance practice should cost or the monetary value of using those core nursing values to deliver high-quality, safe, assured care. Let me take a moment to think about what impact underinvestment within nursing has on us as health professionals, our healthcare system and society. Nurses' pay and conditions are forever at the forefront of concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of nurses and access for those entering the profession.

Strikes led by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) dominated much of 2023 in protest at the government's pay offer, with many RCN members stating that they just could not afford to live on their nursing salary, a sentiment not only impacting those living in our major cities, as it once did.

We also have to consider the fall in the number of people applying to enter nursing – we saw 17% fewer students applying through UCAS to start nursing courses for the 2023/24 academic year (RCN, 2023). There are many reasons for this but I would suggest that the cost of being a nursing student may be a major barrier. Course fees, fear of debt, a severely diminished bursary and a requirement to complete clinical placements and practice learning that can inhibit supplementary earning potential are all issues that I believe contribute to this.

Retention is also a significant problem. We are seeing many registered nurses leaving

the profession for a variety of reasons: retirement, post-pandemic burnout and disillusionment with the profession itself are just some of them.

As we frequently read, this is a perfect storm. More people leaving and fewer people coming into nursing is only going to exacerbate the estimated 34 700 NHS nursing vacancies reported in 2023 in England (NHS Digital, 2024). Underinvestment in our nursing profession plays a huge role in these factors and although I know that the NHS and government don't have a bottomless purse, urgent investment and action is needed to grow the future nursing workforce and continue to upskill and retain our current talented nursing workforce.

So let's use IND 2024 to recognise our own value as registered nurses and our importance in society. Let's work together to ensure that at a local and national level people hear that nursing is important and important things need investment. We need to do this to attract people into nursing and to keep and upskill those already in the profession. And let me wish you all a very happy IND 2024, because we in the registered nurse community are priceless. **BJN**

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December 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8vckn> (accessed 24 April 2024)

NHS Digital. NHS Vacancy Statistics England, April 2015 – December 2023, Experimental Statistics 29 February 2024. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-vacancies-survey/april-2015---december-2023-experimental-statistics> (accessed 26 April 2024)

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