

Royal College of Nursing

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13 January 2025
Ruth Jones MP
Chair of Welsh Affairs
Committee

Helen Whyley, RN, MA

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Cross-border health care

Sent via email to:

ruth.jones.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Chair,

The Royal College of Nursing Wales is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to Welsh Affairs Select Committees' work into the provision of cross-border health care.

The RCN is the world's largest professional body and trade union for nursing staff, representing over half a million members, including nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, with around 30,500 members in Wales. Two thirds of RCN members work outside the hospital environment in the community. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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Helen Whyley

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Mae'r RCN yn cynrychioli nrysys a nyrsio, gan hyrwyddo rhagoriaeth mewn arfer a llunio polisiau iechyd

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
Rydym yn buddsoddi mewn llesiant Arian

Mae'r Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol yn Goleg Brenhinol a sefydlwyd drwy Siarter Frenhinol ac Undeb Llafur Cofestr Arbennig a sefydlwyd a dan Ddeddf Undebau Llafur (Cydgrynhoi) 1992.

The RCN is a Royal College set up by Royal Charter and a Special Register Trade Union established under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

There is a long and porous border between Wales and England. Of the seven Health Boards in Wales, three share a border with England (Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in the north, Powys Teaching Health board in mid Wales, and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in the south). On a daily basis, patients living in one country access care services based in the other country, including for emergency care, neonatal care and primary care. In addition, there are a number of nurses who live in Wales and work in the NHS in England. Based on our own membership data, RCN Wales estimates that this group of nurses significantly outnumber the number who live in England and work in the NHS in Wales. In addition, many nurses from England who work for nursing agencies are deployed to the NHS or to care homes in Wales.

RCN Wales welcomes the Welsh Affairs Committee's work on cross-border health care and believes it to be relevant both from the perspective of nursing and from a patient perspective. There is operational and strategic cross-border cooperation between NHS health care services in Wales and England. However, there are some areas where this could be improved.

For example, software/ICT systems should be designed to enable appropriate cross border access of patient records as well as other relevant information. Given that many individuals and families relocate from Wales to England or from England to Wales, it is crucial, in the interests of patient care, that patients and health care professionals can seamlessly access all relevant information and documentation. This is an area that needs to be considered at the purchase/design/commissioning point and those responsible for commissioning IT systems on both sides of the border need to consider this.

Cross-border cooperation between the two countries could also improve in the area of systems regulation and inspection. In Wales, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) inspects NHS services, and regulates independent healthcare providers; Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) regulates and inspects social care and childcare services; and Social Care Wales (SCW) regulates professionals and care workers who are employed in independent care and support services. In England, Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulates all health and social care services in England. These bodies should strive to improve cross-border cooperation on inspection and regulation with their equivalents on the other side of the border to improve patient care.

UK-wide regulatory bodies that have an England and Wales remit need to ensure they are mindful of relevant differences in NHS structure, policy and critically health and social care legislation in each country. For example, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the independent regulator for nurses and midwives in the UK. In England it also regulates Nursing Associates. The Welsh Government has indicated its wish to introduce this new role of Nursing Associate into Wales

but the legislation to allow the NMC to regulate this is a reserved matter, creating a delay in implementation.

RCN Wales also suggests that it is worth considering if service contracts and commissioning should potentially be negotiated at a Welsh/English level rather than at a local level between individual Trusts or Health Boards. This would ensure a consistency of approach across the length of the border and that a strategic approach can be taken to ensuring the best access to healthcare for the people of Wales.

I do hope this response is of some assistance to you. We look forward to continuing to assist the Committee with its work on cross-border health care.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whyley', is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

HELEN WHYLEY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RCN WALES