

# Unison Retired Members Forum

## Newsletter

February 2018.

Issue 5.

Thank you Liz.

Are our student nurses being treated fairly?

Good news as Age Sector Board members told of new funding.

Dignity Code day receives great public support in BCH – NPC.

New members join Sub Working Group as Health Service hangs by a thread.

Nurses forced to rely on food banks as shortfall in wages causes Financial Peril.



***Hi everyone.***

A Very Happy New Year to all our delegates/members sitting on the Unison Retired Members Forum. This year will be no different from any other year as we start to settle down after a busy Christmas and get back into continuing with our work programme laid out for the year. One of the big issues we have been hearing about across the media is the continuing state of our health service. As retired members we have to continue to ask questions about why our services are the way they are? But we all know the reason. The Sub Working Group on Health will be asking:

Are Student Nurses been treated unfairly?

How Brexit will affect our health service and older people in the future.

What direct rule will mean for our services.

Does Community nursing have all the tools to look after us at home under Bengoa?

What are the implications of people discharging themselves from hospital before a proper care package is put in place?

## **Thank you Liz**

The Joint Chairs, Vice-Chair, Delegates and Members of UNISON Retired Members Forum would like to say a big thank you to Liz for all the hard work she does as our secretary each year. The organisation that she puts in to looking after us whether that is doing the minutes, organising us for conference/meetings, etc she is always to the fore. Long may you continue to be our secretary as you do an excellent job looking after our needs!

## Are Our Student Nurses Being Treated Fairly?

As the health service continues to grasp at straws and wither away in ICU, many questions are being asked as to where things are going wrong. Our doctors, cleaners, caterers, porters, secretaries and laundry workers all play a pivotal role in the day to day running of our hospitals. They are the backbone of the service offered to the community. But there is one part of that backbone that is missing and that is our **nurses/midwives**. The media has highlighted that more than 600 nurses are to be recruited from the Philippines to try to alleviate pressure caused by the chronic nursing shortage in Northern Ireland. The health service is running on a shortage of 1,500 nurses - 10% below capacity. Looking overseas for staff is one of the measures being taken to try to address the problem. Northern Ireland's Chief Nursing Officer, Prof. Charlotte McArdle, says the problem arose because the supply from undergraduate recruitment has not kept up with demand and an ageing workforce.



So where is it all going wrong? Why are students not coming into the service to be trained up in nursing? Outside of what Professor Charlotte Mc Ardle is saying she has not taken a long hard look at the changes that has taken place over the years as she may get an answer to the problem. Let's begin with the Terms & Conditions of Service for our Nurses and Midwives. Down over the years since the late 80's early 90's the Terms & Conditions of Service has been dwindled, cut to ribbons and shredded by managers who for example were moved over into jobs simply because privatisation was beginning to enter into our NHS. These managers who worked in catering, chiropody and other business areas within the service were trained business men who hadn't got a clue about Nursing/Midwifery. They were part of the decision makers who made drastic cuts to Nurses Terms & Conditions.

Up until September 2012 student nurses in Northern Ireland coming into the service received a bursary of £1172.08p per month and this was reduced drastically to £430.42p per month which they are expected to live on from day to day. A separate book and uniform allowance of £190 was also removed at the time. At the time the health Minister in place was Edwin Poots (MLA). The student nurse is expected to pay for digs, food, electricity, rent and most of all their Uniforms. It's not just these issues that student nurses have to face on a daily to monthly bases. They have to rely on foodbanks to keep up their daily nutritional values and as the cost of living continues to

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grow so they become reliant on any help they can get even from family. But that's not all they face on a daily to monthly basis. They are facing a variety of pressures which can lead to stress, isolation, anxiety and illness which can also take its toll on the student nurse committing to a vocation for life. Out of all the occupations that exist in the world the medical profession has one of the highest suicide rates.



Other pressures student nurses face are wide ranging and can be found in the classroom and at ward level. Listed below are some of the issues experienced by students:

**Work commitment – to have work in on time.**

**Insufficiently developed communication skills.**

**Discrimination/Bullying.**

**Lack of clinical/practical skills, knowledge & experience.**

**Lack of motivation at all levels.**

**Lack of skill in confronting the clinical environment and dealing with actual patients.**

With Brexit looming on the horizon our EU nursing population across Great Britain is due to drop by 96% as they are vowing to not reregister due to Brexit. Northern Ireland as part of GB will be experiencing the shortfall as part of the Brexit. Certainly if we ever get a health minister back in place he/she would need to take a long hard look at how they can attract people into the service. Indeed there needs to be a long hard look at the Terms & Conditions & Pay and reintroduce the original bursary that was in place before the changes in 2012. Again if people are looking to come into the profession the issue of treating people with the dignity and respect they deserve has got to be addressed. We cannot sit back and allow some of the issues listed above to have a detrimental effect on the future of nurse training. While discipline plays an important part in the training it must also be said that we are all human. So as a Retired Members Forum we say to the next minister **'Treat our student nurses with the Dignity & Respect they deserve'**.

## **Good news as Age Sector Board Members told of New Funding.**

Board members of Age Sector Platform received good news this month as the CEO Eamon Donaghy announced that new funding had been secured for the sustainability of the organisation but said that the organisation was not out of the woods yet. The announcement came amid speculation that the organisation was facing a crisis and that funding was getting to a low point. The Board members welcomed the announcement and said that it was indeed good news for the future of the organisation and said more money was needed to enhance the sustainability of the organisation. Meanwhile members of the Energy Committee together with Alison McKenna (Communications Manager, ASP) attended a consultation process on the 'Changes to the Affordable Warmth Scheme'. The event was run by the National Energy Action Northern Ireland (NEA NI). This was a gathering of the Fuel Poverty Coalition to look at four important proposals and feed back to the Dept. for Communities (DfC). The day went well and everyone had their say. Age Sector seen one of the ladies in the office hand in her notice to do some traveling. Eleanor Mallon had been with the charity for nearly 4 yrs and was an outstanding worker in her own right. She will be sadly missed in the office and we wish her all the best for the future. There are four workers in the office doing a tremendous job for the charity. ASP Board has now adopted a Code of Conduct for the organisation with effect.

## **Dignity Code Day Receives Great Public Support in Belfast City Hospital – NPC**

Members of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) led by John Martin gathered in the Dining Hall at the Belfast City Hospital to encourage public support for the Dignity Code which had been drawn up by the organisation to put something in place so that older people would receive the proper care and attention they deserve. It came about after the media reported widely that older people were being neglected in our hospitals and were not getting the proper care and attention which they deserved. The NPC wants all the Politicians to sign up to the code and have called for it to be implemented into the training that doctors and nurses receive. Indeed there is still a lot of work to be done round the code and it is hoped that one day the Dignity Code will finally become reality and that the patients and clients of the future will receive the best care possible.

## **Still to come.**

Is the Supermarket bill getting expensive?

Do our professionals rely on foodbanks?

Flu virus causes kayos in A&E's.

Sub Working Group on Health reports.

## **New Members join Sub Working Group as Health Service Hangs by a Thread**

The Sub Working Group on Health meeting got under way at 10.30am sharp. The Chair began by wishing everyone a Very Happy New Year and went on to welcoming the new members of the group. After an introduction round the table the Chair settled everyone down and the work got under way. Before beginning the work the Chair laid out some ground rules in order to give those round the table a fair opportunity to speak by requesting through the chair. Copies of the Bengoa Report and the latest report Power to the People were handed out so everyone was singing from the one hymn sheet. Discussion ensued first round the future of the Health Service and quite a number of concerns were raised.



The chair went on to outline the aims /objectives of the group which is:

**To support actions against cuts.**

**To keep up to date with changes to services.**

**To lobby on health for the rights of everyone.**

Recruiting and retaining staff is certainly a big problem for our health service and we have been listening to the media highlight the problem. The Chief Nursing Officer Prof Charlotte Mc Ardle is currently looking at recruiting 600 nurses from the Philippines and the question has to be asked about why this is the case? The group also raised concern that Domiciliary Care and Prescription Charges are being discussed with not a care in the world. The group members reiterated that we are already paying through our taxes which we continue to pay year on year.

Over the Winter period we have seen ambulance after ambulance backed up at the doors of A&E units across the region as the worst Flu crisis developed. It saw people dying on trollies, waiting times increase for very long periods and ambulance staff unable to unload clients for admission. It was felt by the group that the boards across the region were not prepared for the crisis that immersed and have called on the boards across the region to put more resources on the ground to deal with such incidents in the future. The group finished at 12.45pm and had a bite of lunch before going their separate ways.

## Nurses Forced to Rely on Foodbanks as Shortfall in Wages causes Financial Peril

In this day and age it is unthinkable that the professional nurse is struggling to make ends meet from month to month due to some unforeseen circumstance in their lives. As the cost of living continues to rise so paying the bills and making ends meet continues to be a big struggle for many hundreds of professionals on the caring front line. One of the issues coming to the fore is nurses have been plunged into financial peril and forced to attend food banks all because there was a shortfall in their wages. This can only lead to a bleak future as the debt can only spiral out of control for everyone involved. Of course other issues like poor employment prospects do not help the situation and this combined with an ageing workforce is a real threat to our NHS.

Student nurses coming into the service to train are facing a debt of well over £50,000 at the end of their training and that is having a detrimental effect on their future as this can only lead to stress and anxiety for any new nurse coming on to wards to work for the first time. So whether the nurse is trained, untrained or becoming a student nurse for the first time certainly the issue of trying to make ends meet on a monthly bases is a live issue that must be addressed here in NI and across GB. Almost half of the nurses working in our hospitals struggle on a daily bases to pay their gas and electricity bills. It is a fact that over 20% of nurses struggling on the breadline in NI are skipping meals on a daily bases just so they can feed the rest of the family. Well over 60% of the nursing population across GB including NI are working extra hours just to be able to manage and pay their bills. Something needs to be done now if our nurses are to be able to feed their families and shortfalls in wages must be addressed across the entire region.

