Nurses determined to keep national pay

By Jean Gray and Dina Leifer

THE ROYAL COLLEGE of Nursing may ditch the pay Review Body system in favour of an alternative national mechanism, RCN general secretary Christine Hancock said in her Congress address.

Her pledge came despite an earlier Congress debate which questioned the RB's integrity but called on RCN leaders to continue to fight for its retention.

Miss Hancock promised to fight to restore the RB's integrity, but added: 'If there are any other ways to deliver national pay, we should look at them.'

She said nurses are passionate about a national framework for their pay, distinct from other healthcare workers, not because they are elitist but because nursing 'is a separate healthcare profession'.

In addition, local pay increases the likelihood of industrial unrest, Miss Hancock argued.

'The government seems to think that if it talks about local pay long enough and loud enough, nurses will believe the rhetoric. Well we don't. And we won't believe local pay is good for nursing,' she insisted.

At the beginning of Congress, 100 RCN members marched out onto six local health boards to demonstrate their support for claiming the RB to settle contract.

RCN Council was asked to make urgent representations to ministers on the matter.

Large majority rejects rationing of resources

CLAIMS THAT the rationing of health care is inevitable were rejected by an overwhelming majority of delegates.

The decision puts the RCN at odds with the British Medical Association, which has said people will have to make choices between treatments.

Hazel Heath, chair of the RCN Association for the Care of Elderly People, said the government was wrong to claim the main reason for rationing was more older people.

'Eighty per cent of older people contain their illness needs at home, without a district nurse or home help,' she said.

Evidence shows they respond positively to health promotion. Far from rationing resources, let's target resources effectively,' Ms Heath added.

Staff charter for nurses

THE GOVERNMENT must accept responsibility for nurses' low morale and ensure that the NHS Executive takes steps to improve it, Congress agreed.

Steve Wright of The European Nurse Development Agency said: 'If we're going to have a Patient's Charter, why can't we have staff charter to protect nurses and league tables about staff turnover and satisfaction?'

The RCN Annual Congress met in Bournemouth last week. Over the following four pages Nursing Standard reports on the main resolutions and debates