Champion for nurses ‘a hard act to follow’

Prominent figures from the world of nursing and politics have paid tribute to RCN general secretary Christine Hancock following her announcement that will step down next summer.

Sarah Mullally, chief nursing officer for England: ‘I will be very sorry to see Christine Hancock leave the RCN. Her wise counsel and contribution to the national nursing, midwifery and health visiting agenda will be missed.’

Yvonne Moores, former chief nurse for England: ‘She has had a distinguished leadership, and has been wonderful to work with. She leaves the RCN in a strong position for her successor.’

Virginia Bottomley, health secretary 1992-1995: ‘Christine Hancock was a successful and effective general secretary. She has been a great champion for nurses – fearless, independent and a great credit to the RCN.’

Jackie Carnell, director of the Community Practitioners’ and Health Visitors’ Association: ‘She has brought a calm and wise presence to an extremely difficult job.’

Anne Marie Rafferty, nurse historian and researcher: ‘She has been a great moderniser. She has taken nursing to the top table and not reserved that place only for an elite: nurses have been to Number 10 for the first time.’

Debbie Murdock, RCN council chair: ‘There is a philosophy that no one is irreplaceable, but Christine has taken the RCN so far that it is hard to imagine anyone else in the post.’

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Christine Hancock: thought of retiring last December

Headhunt begins for new RCN general secretary

By Graham Scott

THE HUNT for a successor to Christine Hancock will start in earnest next week, following the RCN general secretary’s announcement that she will stand down in June.

Miss Hancock revealed her decision to members of the college’s governing council in the private session of their meeting in Cardiff last week.

Speculation that she would retire next summer had been intense since it was announced last month that she is the only person nominated to become the next president of the International Council of Nurses.

But she told Nursing Standard that the speculation had been ‘right for the wrong reason’. She had first thought of retiring last December and revealed her intention to RCN council chair Debbie Murdock in February.

But the decision of council to ballot on offering associate membership to healthcare assistants delayed her departure. Miss Hancock said she has plumped for next June because she wants council to have plenty of time to find her successor.

Ms Murdock said council members will meet next Monday to discuss the appointment, which ideally will be made by early next year so the new general secretary is in post before Congress in May.

‘We will be discussing the matter with a recruitment agency that we are considering using. We shall also start looking at things like a job description, person specification and salary.’

The post will be advertised widely but, if an agency is asked to help, it would ‘headhunt’ potential candidates, Ms Murdock said. She refused to speculate on potential successors.

Possible successors

Among those sure to be linked to the post are assistant general secretary Tom Bolger, RCN Institute director Alison Kitson and policy director Pippa Gough. Potential outsiders include Commission for Health Improvement nurse director Liz Fradd, UKCC chief executive Sue Norman and Ray Rowden, who narrowly missed out on becoming RCN president last month. Another contender could be Neslyn Watson Druce, an independent nurse consultant with a good track record in developing nurse leaders.

Ms Murdock said she hoped the new general secretary would work alongside Miss Hancock for the first few months.

Agency may be called in after Hancock announces she will stand down next summer

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Plans to walk across Europe

CHRISTINE HANCOCK plans to walk ‘from Poland to Portugal’ and learn French after she retires as RCN general secretary next summer.

She says she has other plans too, but they do not include stepping on the toes of her successor, who will be left to get on with job – unless they seek Miss Hancock’s advice.

Miss Hancock will be remembered as the general secretary who oversaw the end of the RCN ban on members taking industrial action and the welcoming into the fold of unregistered nursing staff.

But she says: ‘I don’t think there are many things that I can claim the credit for. There is a fantastic group of staff at the RCN and most of what has been achieved has been down to what nurses have done. All that I have been able to do is articulate in the right places what nurses are actually doing.’

She feels that the RCN is stronger than ever and points to the government’s NHS Plan for England as evidence of how far nurses have progressed in recent years. See analysis page 14

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