that run on diesel fuel. They couldn't sustain a full quota of home visits. Meals on wheels and other vital services faced major disruption. Taxi drivers who move blood supplies between hospitals couldn't access petrol. The firm that removes environmental waste from hospitals in Greater Manchester reluctantly had to withdraw its services.

NHS staff couldn't get to work. Operations were cancelled and patients couldn't attend outpatient clinics. I believe that had the action continued for a longer period, the protesters would have had blood on their hands. This must not be allowed to happen again.

As we head into winter, ensuring that everyone receives the care they need will become more acute. It is important that those who behave in this reckless way be held responsible for the consequences of their actions.

Professor Dr John Ashton
Regional director of public health/regional medical officer
NHS Executive, North West

Don't wait until nurses run out of steam

Major government plans and budget promises have brought optimism to a de-valued and demoralised workforce. Nurses, it seems, are crucial to the success of the new NHS; an NHS with a new plan and purpose to form partnerships, promote health and prevent illness, inequalities and social exclusion.

Nurses know how to deliver quality care. However, often limited resources do not allow them to. Nurses know how to empower patients and provide fast access to the services they need, though demand often outweighs capacity. These problems are being acknowledged and strategies devised to deal with them. But it will take time, we are told. Regarding pay, it has been said that the government must 'strike while the iron is hot'. But the iron has been hot for some time.

Over the years, government steam has burnt holes in the very fabric of our profession, leaving just a bunch of rags covered in scorches.

Better pay is not the panacea for nurses, but it is definitely a step in the right direction. Investment in nursing is an investment in the NHS.

Heath Carter
North Staffordshire

Euro MPs want to hear what we think too

I write in support of Jonathan Clark (Letters October 11), who said that nurses may feel unable to influence politics, but MPs want to hear from us because they want to get it right.

Having just returned from visiting the European Parliament with RCN officers and other RCN activists from the East Midlands region, I believe that European MPs (MEPs) also want to hear from nurses so they get it right.

The visit was instigated by Sandie Jones, senior officer for RCN East Midlands, who I would like to thank for arranging such a visit. I believe it was the first for RCN members like myself.

Nurses as individuals cannot dictate the policies made by MPs and MEPs, but we can influence the process by lobbying and making our views known to them.

I hope the initiative shown by the East Midlands region in giving RCN members the opportunity to see how individuals can participate in all aspects of politics is replicated by other regions. This would increase the likelihood of MPs and MEPs getting it right – for the benefit of all.

John Lister
Sheffield