Beverly Malone looks at ‘crunch issues’ for nurses, including pension reform

This is a time of challenge and change. More than ever, the RCN has to do what we do best – campaign on the issues affecting our patients, profession and healthcare system.

My approach is straightforward: any policy or reform that affects nurses or patients, or shapes the provision of healthcare, is the business of every member of the nursing family – and that makes it RCN business.

First, last and always, the RCN is a campaigning organisation. And nothing better highlights the RCN’s campaigning role than the following three crunch issues:

1. Agenda for Change (AfC) – The RCN has long argued that nurses deserve to be valued through a decent pay and career structure.

   A better deal for nurses means a better deal for patients. So we dedicated ourselves to a campaign that has involved five years of tough negotiations. Our campaigning is now being transformed into a practical workplace reality. But the RCN will continue to campaign so that AfC is fully resourced and fairly implemented.

2. The proposed reform of primary care – The government’s recent announcement about the future structure and roles of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts has caused huge anxiety among nursing staff about their futures.

   I am concerned that the government is redefining the NHS by moving it away from being a provider of services and employer of staff, to simply being the commissioner of health services. Reforms do not come bigger than this. So we are demanding a longer and broader consultation process and calling on the government to spell out exactly what its ‘end game’ is.

3. Pensions reform – The government’s work to 65 proposal is bad for nurses and patients. At a time of a world nursing shortage we should be encouraging people into the profession, not putting them off.

   If nurses are forced to work longer and retire later then recruitment and retention levels will collapse, work demands placed on nurses will rocket and patient care will suffer. So the government should be under no illusions – we say loudly ‘NO to 65’.

   I believe that campaigning matters. It makes a difference to people’s lives. It also means that the RCN does exactly what it says on the tin – stand up for nurses and speak out for patients NS

Beverly Malone is RCN general secretary

David Newnham had learned his lesson in cynicism by the time ‘flu-killing tissues’ appeared

My English teacher, ever keen to sharpen our critical faculties, once told us about the time he was taken in by a newspaper advert.

‘Wonder fly killer,’ it said. ‘100 per cent effective. Kills all species. Allow 28 days for delivery.’

It sounded too good to be true. But he sent off his money anyway, and a month later received a package containing two blocks of wood and an instruction sheet.

‘Place Block A on table,’ said the manual. ‘Place fly on Block A and strike hard with Block B.’

I recalled this story when Janet produced the wonder tissues. ‘Kills 99.9 per cent of cold and flu viruses in the tissue,’ said the box. Well what earthly good is that?

As I understand it, coughs and sneezes spread diseases. And as a pair of flu experts from Queen Mary’s School of Medicine recently pointed out, sticky hands also spread them. And the best fix for sticky hands is soap and water.

But killing bugs that have already been caught in a tissue? How long would they live anyway?

According to the box, tests have shown that the wondrous ingredient concealed within the ‘clever, treated middle layer’ (the ingredient appears to be citric acid – how clever is that?) finishes the little blighters off within 15 minutes, ‘before they spread’. And how, exactly, are they supposed to spread once they have been trapped in a tissue?

True, the odd toddler – and I do know some very odd toddlers – might suck on a used tissue. I would have thought that a used tissue was the sort of place where the average virus might expect to expire in peace, its spreading days over.

But what about the above-average virus? Well I find a sharp blow with a block of wood usually does the trick.

David Newnham is a freelance writer