In the face of more budget cuts, nurses face uphill struggle to secure fair pay

Delegates at last month’s RCN congress in Liverpool sent out a clear message that the NHS should remain free at the point of delivery (News June 25).

A resolution calling for a fixed fee of £10 to be introduced for GP appointments was rejected by 91 per cent of delegates. Speakers said that introducing a charge could deter many people from seeking medical attention and be another nail in the coffin of the NHS.

The NHS has generally come out well on access to treatment, although there has been some recent slippage with outpatient waiting lists, delays in emergency departments and getting appointments with GPs. Harsh choices will have to be made as further budget cuts are in the pipeline, and there will need to be a tighter rationing of care, treatment and expensive medication.

In this stark scenario of rationing and cutbacks, the campaign for safe staffing levels and pay rises for nurses, healthcare assistants and care workers is going to be even more of an uphill struggle.

Bridget Ryan, by email

THE GAP IS WIDENING BETWEEN FRONT LINE STAFF AND MANAGERS

Nurses and managers are far from being ‘all in it together’ (Analysis June 25). Senior managers’ pay increased on average by 6.1 per cent in the past two years, while nurses’ pay increased by just 1.6 per cent.

With those on lower pay bands receiving pennies and higher paid managers getting a sizeable year-on-year increase, the disparity between the front line staff and managers is getting wider.

There is also the issue of bonuses, benefits, expenses and perks such as company cars and mileage allowances.

I am shocked to read that two trust chief executives each received bonuses last year of £40,000. This is obscene.

Sally Harding, by email

OUR NHS IS A WORLD LEADER, BUT IT COULD DO MORE ON PREVENTION

I am heartened that a recent survey undertaken by the American-based Commonwealth Fund (www.commonwealthfund.org) revealed that the NHS is one the world’s best healthcare systems.

The United States ranks last overall on measures of health system quality, efficiency, access to care, equity and healthy lives. This is despite having the most expensive healthcare system of the 11 western countries surveyed.

Having worked in the US, and with family living in New York State, I have seen the best and the worst of health care in the US and in England.

In the US, there is a greater emphasis on preventive healthcare and medicine, but only for those able to afford health insurance. The NHS in England is good at critical care, looking after those who are poorly, and there is generally good access to primary care.

I would like the NHS to focus more on the prevention of disease and ill-health, on helping improve quality of life and health, and cutting waste and bureaucracy. The administration costs in the US are particularly high, but much of this is to do with billing for services and medication.

Christine Clark, by email

DESIGNING HEALTH POLICIES TO WIN VOTES IS DESPICABLE BEHAVIOUR

In a recent survey, three quarters of the respondents said they believe that key health policies are shaped primarily to win votes (online news digest June 23). They say the political parties design health policy to ‘score points at the despatch box’ rather than protect and improve the NHS. Two thirds of the respondents want politicians to have no say in the running of the health service.

The National Health Action Party agrees with the overwhelming