Protests won’t stop until the cap is scrapped, warns RCN

By Matthew Mckew @Matthew_MckewNS

The RCN pledged its summer of protest ‘has only just started’, after the government insisted the 1% cap on nurse pay will remain.

RCN general secretary Janet Davies told Nursing Standard the college won’t stop until it receives written confirmation from prime minister Theresa May that the cap will be scrapped.

The chief secretary to the treasury said last week that the pay cap would ensure recruitment and retention was balanced with sustainability.

Many Conservative MPs echoed her comments, including former chancellor Kenneth Clarke, who said lifting the cap could lead to ‘economic disaster’.

But Liberal Democrat leadership candidate Sir Vince Cable said raising pay for public sector workers would reflect ‘economic reality’.

The debate followed Prime Minister’s Questions, where Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn raised the issue of NHS staff pay. Ms May responded: ‘People may not realise that there is not only the overall public sector pay increase, but, for many nurses, increments or progression pay as well. A typical band 5 nurse will receive 3.8% over and above the 1%.’

However, government figures released last week show median pay for nurses fell by almost £1 an hour between 2010 and 2015.

Ms Davies said: ‘Our summer of protest has only just started and nurses are taking to the streets to stand up for safe patient care and the profession they love.

‘In the first two weeks of the campaign, we have staged...’
50 events and earned public and cross-party political backing. ‘Liz Truss said she is listening to the Pay Review Body, but she must recall that they said the cap is unsustainable. It stands in the way of filling the 40,000 nurse posts that are vacant in England alone.

‘Theresa May must scrap the 1% pay cap. We won’t stop until we have that in writing.’

As the RCN’s campaign got underway, almost 5,000 nurses contacted their local MPs to lobby for their support, and nurses staged demonstrations outside Department of Health buildings in London and Birmingham.

‘Nurses don’t grow on trees’

At another event last week, which was not part of the RCN campaign, nurses delivered a ‘magic money tree’ to the department in Whitehall, in reference to Ms May’s comments during the general election campaign.

Nurses at the demonstration chanted ‘nurses don’t grow on trees, have a heart, stop the freeze’ and ‘Theresa found her money tree, not for nurses, the DUP’. Nurse Danielle Tiplady, who organised the Whitehall protest, said: ‘Latest statistics showing people leaving the register are shocking, and pay is a huge factor. All we are asking for is a fair deal.’

Ms Tiplady was also behind a petition in January calling for an end to the pay cap, which was signed by more than 100,000 people.

A woman who defrauded the NHS of £88,000 by faking her identity to gain three nursing student places has been given a suspended prison sentence.

Eleanor Bonde produced false documents and ‘invented’ two dependent children in the 11-year fraud, during which she obtained course fees and bursary payments.

Bonde, who used three fake birth certificates in the deception beginning in 2001, gained places on degree courses at the University of Surrey, University of Brighton and Anglia Ruskin University.

NHS Protect, which tackles fraud in the health service, said the total loss to the NHS was £88,804 – enough to pay the salaries of four newly qualified nurses.

NHS Protect managing director and interim chief executive of the NHS Counter Fraud Authority Sue Frith said: ‘In this case, a lot of public money has gone to waste to train and support someone who was well aware she was not eligible for the courses, the course funding or the bursaries. The NHS can ill afford to be exploited in this way.’

Bonde pleaded guilty to three counts of fraud at her trial in June. She applied for three nursing degree places and used false documents to enrol at Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Brighton, but failed all courses part way through, so did not qualify as a nurse. Between April 2004 and February 2007, Bonde obtained £21,850 in course fees and bursaries from the NHS by deception.

A judge at Guildford Crown Court sentenced Bonde to 15 months in prison, suspended for two years.