Unions demand action to improve nurses’ pay

By Petra Kendall-Raynor

Health unions have united in calling on the NHS Pay Review Body to recommend a meaningful pay rise for NHS staff.

The government needs to inject £280 million into the NHS by 2020, or ministers will find themselves in breach of their own minimum wage laws, according to the unions.

The RCN has described the erosion of nurses’ pay as unsustainable and putting patient care at risk.

NHS Staff Side, made up of representatives from 13 unions, submitted its annual evidence to the RB, which advises government on health service staff pay. The evidence claims more than £4.3 billion has been cut from NHS staff salaries in England alone between 2010 and 2016 and calls for:

» A return to UK-wide pay scales using Scotland as the reference point.
» A restructuring of bands 1-3 to pay the living wage.
» A pay award in line with the retail price index for Agenda for Change (AfC) staff.
» A comprehensive workforce strategy.

Unions say NHS pay has failed to keep pace with inflation, and by 2021 the lowest paid employees will be earning less than the minimum wage.

RCN general secretary Janet Davies warned: ‘At a time when the gap in earnings between nursing staff and other graduate professions is growing, the 1% pay cap for NHS staff is unsustainable.’

NHS trade unions chair Christina McAnea said sustained government attacks on health workers pay posed a threat to the future of AfC.

A Department of Health spokesperson said the government had taken ‘difficult decisions’. ‘But we will continue to fund public sector pay awards, including for NHS staff, at an average of 1% next year.’

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