PENSION CHANGES

Rise in retired nurses returning to NHS

A third of nurses who retired from the NHS two years ago returned to work after pension scheme changes allowed them to practise without losing out financially. NHS England data show 4,600 (44%) of the 10,300 nurses who retired between July 2021 and June 2022 rejoined the NHS within 12 months, representing an increase of four percentage points since the previous year.

This comes after changes to NHS pension rules mean staff eligible to retire at 55 can return to the health service without compromising their pension. The changes were introduced during the pandemic and extended this year. Since 1 April, nurses and other staff can re-commence their pension contributions if they return to work. And from 1 October, a new partial retirement option has been available to NHS staff, allowing them to draw down some of their pension while continuing to work.

NHS England chief workforce, training and education officer Navina Evans said: ‘The retire-and-return arrangements help the NHS to retain highly experienced staff for longer, which supports colleagues and patients.’

RCN national officer team leader Chris Musgrave said retired nurses returning to work cannot be a ‘silver bullet to solve the workforce crisis in the NHS’. ‘Creating conditions where older workers can continue to work if they want to must be implemented alongside other measures to improve recruitment and retention,’ he said.

According to NHS England, nurses aged 55-59 are more likely to return to work than those over 60. Almost half (48%) of NHS pension members from all staff groups, and more than half of recently retired nurses (56.3%), returned.

PANDEMIC

Chief nurse worked ‘under cover’ in ITU

Chief nursing officer (CNO) Ruth May worked ‘under cover’ in intensive care during the pandemic, she revealed at Nursing Live as she shared stories of her most memorable patients.

England’s most senior nurse (pictured above) told a panel at the two-day celebration of nursing run by RCNi that she returned to the front line every Sunday, working at the intensive care unit (ITU) of Colchester Hospital while continuing her role with NHS England.

The panel, on which she was joined by Scotland’s deputy CNO Anne Armstrong and CNO for Wales Sue Tranka, was asked to reflect on patients who had made an impression on them.

Dame Ruth told the audience about two patients who stood out for her during her career, including a paramedic she treated during the pandemic.

‘The second patient would be the last patient I cared for properly, which was in wave two of the pandemic at Colchester ITU,’ she said.

‘I worked there a lot – they knew who I was but I didn’t make a thing of it. There was a paramedic there who I cared for who I will always remember.’

She also shared a story of an older patient who she treated when she was a first-year nursing student.

‘She got me a present but I never got to receive it from her as she had a cardiac arrest and died, but she was amazing. She affected me because what she wanted from me was my compassionate care. The present was a flan dish, and I still use it.’