emergency resolutions were debated, on topics including student funding, Brexit and Northern Ireland pay parity

People who currently self-medicate with cannabis are deemed criminals under the law

‘Mere ‘safe’ staffing falls short of therapeutic need’

By John Ely @JohnEly_NS

Simply having safe staffing levels is not enough for therapeutic settings, the congress audience was told.

Nurses spoke of the importance of taking time with mental health patients and were concerned about the implications of safe – or minimum – staffing numbers for these therapeutic relationships.

Leading the discussion, RCN mental health forum chair Ed Freshwater said: ‘I know in my practice that a chat over a coffee is as important as doing baseline observations. Spending time listening to someone’s fears and dreams, anxieties and hopes, can be as vital as a surgical procedure.’

Congress expressed concern about using what some see as such a blunt approach to mental health staffing, leading to a vote urging the RCN to commission research into therapeutic staffing levels.

The RCN also demanded that safe staffing legislation is enacted across the UK as it released a report on a survey of 30,000 nurses, which showed an overworked workforce struggling to deliver care.

Stop workforce from falling off a cliff, college tells government

Nurses called for urgent action on recruitment and retention in the profession, saying it stands at a ‘dangerous workforce precipice’.

RCN congress condemned what it sees as the UK government’s failure to recognise the effects of its policies on the ability to sustain the profession.

The conference in Belfast called for credible action to address nurse shortages, which are estimated at 40,000 in England alone.

RCN UK stewards committee London member Michael Smith summarised some of the pressures facing the profession.

‘Are you overstretched, understaffed, exhausted at work? Does that sound familiar?’ he asked the packed auditorium.

‘All too often our patients miss out on vital care’

Mr Smith said the lack of nurses in the UK was affecting patient safety and putting incredible pressure on staff. ‘The severe lack of registered nurses means that all too often our patients miss out on vital care,’ he said.

‘And those of us left in the profession struggle to pick up the pieces.’

In a call backed by the audience, Mr Smith urged nurses to send a clear message to government to:

» Deliver fair pay for nurses.

» Enact safe staffing legislation across the UK.

» Reintroduce support for nursing students.