

Royal College of Nursing union chief resigns amid mounting anger over NHS pay deal

Our reporters**1 September 2018**

Janet Davies, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), has announced her resignation effective at the end of August.

Her resignation is an attempt by the union bureaucracy to placate their members, who are incensed by the sell-out pay deal RCN negotiated with 13 other unions.

Maria Trewern, Chair of the Royal College of Nursing Council, said, "The RCN and Janet Davies have decided to part ways by mutual agreement. We thank her for all her service to the College as Chief Executive and General Secretary over the past three years and wish her well."

They did not announce a settlement figure for this highly paid (£137,000) union bureaucrat.

Prior to resigning, Davies was forced to make a personal apology to RCN members as soon as the real facts about the pay deal were exposed in workers' pay packets. She admitted that the information RCN had given was misleading.

Health workers have used social media platforms to denounce the pay settlement. A petition of RCN members demanding the RCN leadership step down and a general meeting be called to discuss the sell-out received well above the necessary thousand signatures within 24 hours.

In response, the RCN had to announce an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), to be held September 28 in Birmingham, but the union has reiterated that they have no plans to reopen the pay deal.

The RCN and 12 other unions, including the main public sector union, Unison, endorsed the pay deal in March after negotiations with the government. The RCN proclaimed it "the best deal in eight years" and sold it to its 432,000 members with claims that "it will amount to an increase of at least 6.5% over three years, but much more for some members, up to 29%."

The RCN claimed that every member would get a 3 percent pay rise this July, backdated from April. To secure acceptance the unions threatened members that

failure to accept this "best deal" would allow the implementation of the National Health Service (NHS) pay review body's recommendations, i.e., a pay rise of one percent a year.

However, the back pay health workers received in August failed to meet any of their expectations. Health workers in England are reporting average take-home back pay of around just £75. Many will receive a meagre pay increase of 1.5 percent this year, with the promise to have the balance with their incremental pay progression.

The pay deal is also bound up with performance targets and the next phase of pay progression can be halted unless workers meet already raised performance criteria. Although the lowest paid workers in the NHS will get a relatively higher increase, the deal sees their sickness enhancement payment slashed and unsocial hours payment decreased by several percentage points.

Public sector employees have seen a 14 percent cut to their real wages over the last eight years. This was enforced through pay freezes and pay caps with the complicity of the trade unions. Under these circumstances, even if the whole 6.5 percent increase is implemented in three years it will still amount to a pay cut. This is even more the case when considering that the combined Retail Price Index inflation rise for the next three years is estimated at 9.6 percent.

Health workers have spoken to NHS FightBack reporting teams. In Sheffield at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital a team distributed the WSWS article NHS trade unions' "best deal in eight years" revealed as a fraud. It states that "NHS staff must act and organise independently of the trade unions and establish rank-and-file committees to unite with all other workers coming under ferocious attack. On this basis, a powerful joint offensive can be established of NHS workers, local government staff, education workers and employees throughout the public sector."

This was read by porters, cleaners, physiotherapists and nurses who were unanimous in their criticism of the pay agreement and voiced their concern over the future of the NHS. Among the most critical were the lowest paid of NHS staff, who the trade unions had claimed stood most to gain through the deal.

Sally-Ann, a hospital cleaner, stated, “We have been shafted. At the UNISON meeting before the vote on the deal, we were told by the union representative point blank that when we moved up from a band 1 to a band 2 we would not lose our weekend enhancement rate paid at double time, but we have.

“Once you take into account the increase in tax contributions and national insurance payments there is no real improvement. You ask yourself what was this all about. The union seems to be in management’s pocket.

“We work in the NHS, we are all one body. We should be fighting together for jobs, equal terms, equality all the way down the line. But this not happening. I can see the way things are, the NHS will not be here much longer, it will all be privatised.”

Sally-Ann said that a new member of staff had just joined who had worked at Amazon in a fulfilment centre and described working conditions as “atrocious”.

Her colleague, a catering assistant, explained that things were not much better for them in the NHS. If they were three minutes late management would dock a quarter of an hour’s pay. “This practice was described as ‘Dickensian’ in relation to Mike Ashley and Sports Direct and they [Sports Direct] were told by parliament to put a stop to it. But it happens in the NHS.

“What annoys me is that Jeremy Hunt (former Conservative health secretary) said thanks for being patient for the pay rise. But we were never given a choice. This is not a pay increase. The deal should be thrown out.”

Anton is a psychiatric nurse at Airedale General Hospital in West Yorkshire and his daughter Poppy is a Health Care Assistant at a psychiatric hospital in Bradford.

Anton said, “The deal is a pay cut really! If you look at the cost of living and the seven year pay freeze, in real terms it’s a pay cut. It’s not what the unions are making it out to be.

“The general reactions from the people I work with is they thought it was going to be a good deal even though people on lower bands are getting a higher percentage.

“I am on band 5 and the key issue is that because qualified nurses are so badly paid when you look at the

training and qualifications and unsociable hours and the general level of stress—a lot of the wards are undermanned and running at 50 percent of what is needed. Even though they have got the money for the posts people are leaving in droves.”

Poppy said, “This is what has put me off training to be a nurse, it’s hard enough going to university, not getting paid and racking up £40,000 debt to pay back and being less than I am on now. As a mental health worker on a band 2, I have benefited by £350 a month from this deal, but I don’t have the same responsibilities as nurses. If I was qualified I would be responsible for a whole number of things.”

Anton explained, “Nurses are on band 5,6,7 and Health Care Assistants on band 2,3,4. As a nurse you can be responsible for a whole number of wards. There is a whole restructuring now taking place because of the shortage of qualified nurses and the band 5 and 6 are becoming more managerial than hands on. They are getting band 4s to admit people to hospital.”

Poppy said that even as a band 2 she had been asked to admit people.

Anton said, “The NHS is crumbling and workers are becoming angry and demoralised. I hear colleagues say on a regular basis they would rather be stacking shelves. They certainly aren’t doing it for the money. It’s a meaningful job but really stressful.”

He said of the unions, “They play more of a PR role in selling cheap insurance, not fighting for workers’ rights or the class struggle. In the past eight years, I have never seen a union rep.”



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