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## Q

A new National Living Wage of £7.20 an hour for over-25s has been proposed by the Government from April next year, set to rise to £9 an hour by 2020. It will apply to part-time and full-time workers.

The minimum wage will remain in place for workers under 25. The current National Minimum Wage is £6.50 an hour for those aged 21 and over. As of 1 October this is set to rise by 20p to £6.70 an hour.

## Q

Yes, but this is only used by employers on a voluntary basis as set out by the Living Wage Foundation. The proposed Government changes are less than the current Living Wage Foundation recommendation of £7.85 an hour and £9.15 in London, but would be mandatory for employees over 25.

## Q

If you are aged 25 or over and currently earn less than £7.20 an hour you will be eligible for a “top-up” in wages from April next year.

## RCN

We will be responding to the consultation on the proposed National Living Wage. Where we have joint relations we are working with National Minimum Wage employers to negotiate for the Living Wage Foundation’s recommended living wage as a minimum to underpin fair pay and career structures.

## Q

Well there are some challenges. The RCN is concerned about pay differentials – the difference in pay between roles – getting narrower and that employers will cut costs by not paying staff for things like worked breaks, handovers and holidays. The RCN also wants to see opportunities for career progression and members to feel valued and properly rewarded for their dedication and hard work.

## Q



Some HCSWs lack support to be able to reflect effectively and achieve the best results for them,” explains Karen Dutton, who is a workplace education facilitator at Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. “But through learning more about how to do it properly, it becomes a very powerful tool that can really enhance learning and development.”

To improve support for HCSWs, RCN learning rep Karen ran face-to-face workshops based on the RCN’s learning resource *First Steps*. Since it was first launched in 2011, this has proved to be the most popular of the RCN’s online learning resources, reaching up to 1,000 people a day.

Now a new version builds on the success of its predecessor, incorporating a wider range of topics, improved access from smart phones and tablets – and more opportunities for reflection.

## Ev

“It’s a fantastic resource,” says Tanis Hand, RCN Professional Lead for HCAs and APs. “We’ve taken everything that users have told us they think works well and then added to it, making it even better. We know that there is a real lack of learning resources for health care





# Case study

they needed to the form to update us, which could be put into the computer and printed out on the form for us to use,” explains Karen. The form has a general template outlining when the patient had surgery, their mobility assistance requirements, mental health, infection risk and nutritional and elimination needs. The system was piloted over a two-month period and then formally evaluated.

## Sm

“The new system meant that we could get onto the ward a lot quicker and help patients with their breakfasts if they needed it,” says Michael, who has been an HCSW for more than three years. “The form has also been useful in making notes about patients and their preferences. For example, a man on the ward wouldn’t eat his porridge as he was being spoon-fed. His wife told me that if I just gave him marmalade on toast, he’d be happy to eat that himself, so I made a note of it on the handover form,” he added.

The new system has been shown to benefit staff and patients alike and is being developed to be used on other surgical wards across the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Due to the success of Karen and Michael’s idea, the pair won the Health Care Support Worker category for the RCN Northern Ireland Nurse of the Year awards in May. Michael, who left his role at Antrim Area Hospital to start a new job in Belfast at the same time as receiving the award, says: “It was a brilliant feeling to leave my post on a high. It’s a great team and we all do a great job, but to be recognised and



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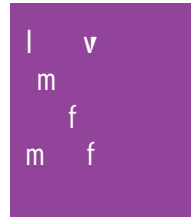
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**B** For five years I was a health care support worker at Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, where I developed a passion for supporting and empowering adults with mental health issues. During this time I became involved with quality improvement in my team using the Department of Health's *Essence of Care* framework to benchmark fundamental care standards.

Alongside care delivery, I've always been interested in service improvement. I've led projects to improve communication and interpersonal skills, as well as trust-wide programmes to implement *Essence of Care* and dignity strategies. I eventually became a facilitator for *Essence of Care* and dignity across the whole trust, and the experience I gained in this role had a big influence on my career.



My current role as clinical lead for unregistered practitioner development has enabled me to use my frontline experience as an HCSW to influence the direction of unregistered practice across the organisation.

We have recently been exploring how unregistered practitioners can support students on placement, and I'm currently creating a series of short films highlighting the motivations, values and skills of unregistered practitioners.

I believe an empowered workforce makes for better care. HCSWs can sometimes feel as though they are at the bottom of the hierarchy, but there is always more than one pathway.

Nothing is impossible. My advice is to trust your instincts, recognise your own value, and remember that there are more opportunities available than we often realise.



# S a a I

# Young, RCN Health and Practice (HP) Council

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The committee reports directly to RCN Council through its dedicated HP Council members and provides a platform for HCAs and APs to influence RCN policy at a UK and local level.

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