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**Keynote Address: “RCN IN Guidelines”**

Introduction

Thank you for that kind introduction

But thank you also for inviting me to speak at such an important event

I say “important” because, as far as I’m concerned, the issues we are discussing here today are right at the very top of the nursing and healthcare agendas

And that’s something I truly believe...not just as the RCN President ...

...but as someone who is proud to be a frontline, working nurse

Colleagues, today, with your indulgence, I’d like to talk to you about internationally recruited nurses and the ways in which we can...and must...help and support them

The very fact that we are here today is proof of the enormous increase in the number of nurses who have travelled to work in the UK.

Beyond any doubt the contribution of these nurses to healthcare delivery in the UK has been as staggering as it is welcome

Indeed, in some parts of the country, the National Health Service would be struggling to keep its head above water without these overseas nurses.

International recruitment, initially portrayed as a short-term stop gap, has become a core component of NHS recruitment.

In fact, **with** international recruitment, the UK has been able to achieve growth in the nursing population.

And we all know that, **without** international recruitment the UK would be running hard just to stand still.

But there's something else we know too....

....and that's the very real problems that INs face when they arrive here

We have research evidence which shows case after case where INs are not accepted in the workplace due to visible differences

Case after case where they are not valued.

Case after case where their skills are not fully utilised

Case after case where they are left isolated and unsupported.

And let me tell you this....if any member of our nursing family suffers these problems **JUST ONCE** then, in my book, that's **ONCE TOO OFTEN**.

That's why the work we are doing at the RCN to develop a robust and effective framework of support for overseas nurses, is so crucial.

At the very centre of our work are good practice guidelines on recruitment and retention of INs

And, as well as being inspired and driven by the right reasons, these guidelines also perform an essential function....

...they help us to understand what motivates nurses to leave their home country to come to work in the UK

And, in terms of supporting overseas nurses, gaining an understanding of the personal, professional, social and financial circumstances that motivated their

migration is absolutely crucial if we are also to understand how we are to meet their expectations once they arrive in the UK

In other words, at the heart of our guidelines is a recognition that, if we are to fully and properly support overseas nurses, then as employers, recruitment agencies, trade unions, managers, government and society as a whole, we must do the following:

- We need to tell potential recruits what to expect – that means clear information about life in the UK
- We need to find out what they want – that means we will be better placed to find them the right post in the right setting
- We need to explain what the job involves and whether it matches their expectations, as well as their qualifications and experience– that means we will be able to deliver the best package for the nurse and the best care for the patient
- And we need to give the full protection of our employment law – that means we will be able to tackle and hopefully prevent the unacceptable exploitation that too many of them now suffer.

Our guidelines also highlight the absolute centrality of effective mentoring in supporting internationally recruited nurses once they arrive in the UK.

Colleagues, the role of mentors cannot be over exaggerated

Not only do they guide recruits through their induction and adaptation

Not only do they provide professional training...

.... but they can also be a source of much needed emotional support.

In developing our guidance we have also highlighted the important issue of professional adaptation

Naturally, the degree of adaptation INs will have to undertake will depend on their country of origin

But we recognise that preparation on the part of employers and managers is also key.

So, employers need to make sure managers are properly informed about the arrival of INs.....

...and managers should do all that they can to support INs...

That means everything from introducing them to colleagues and patients...

...to monitoring their acceptance and their treatment in their new workplace

...to helping them overcome any initial language problems

...to ensuring that the effects of the culture shock sometimes experienced by INs is NOT compounded by work overload and stress

The RCN guidelines also shine a light on the role played by recruitment agencies.

There is, of course, a Code of Practice that governs the recruitment of INs – mandatory for the NHS and voluntary for those private recruitment agencies which choose to sign up to the Code.

But, as with any voluntary code, the more professional and conscientious agencies abide by it while the remainder remain are free to ignore it

So let's be under no illusions...

If this code is really to be fit for purpose – to protect INs and the healthcare sectors of the developing countries from which they come, then....

...it must apply equally across both the public and the private sectors

...and it must be properly monitored and rigorously enforced.

Colleagues, a central plank of our guidelines can be summed up in one word.....

**.....respect**

In everything we do to help and support INs we need to ensure that they get the respect they deserve

Our research shows that too many INs feel that their experience and skills are neither appreciated nor respected

That has to be wrong and that has to change

INs deserve respect in relation to their skills and expertise

But they also deserve respect when it comes to their professional development....

....their personal development...

...and their pay and grading

Quite simply, they deserve respect right across the board

And the change needed to deliver that respect has to come from every quarter

From management, from colleagues and from the public.

But it should also come from the media and from politicians.

Frankly, there have been times when I've been sickened by the casual bigotry and provocative language that, too often in recent years, has stained the immigration and asylum debate in this country.

Because never forget.....today's cheap headline, populist policy or unthinking bigoted remark can end up being tomorrow's race hate victim.

Colleagues, for me, the RCN's work in supporting and helping overseas nurses is driven by a concept that seems to be going out of fashion these days....and that concept is PRINCIPLE.

The principle to which I refer is this.....the RCN values nurses in all their diversity

As President of the RCN I believe with all my heart that diversity matters

And it matters because diversity is about valuing differences between people, eliminating barriers, providing opportunities and changing attitudes.

But diversity is also inseparable from equality

They are two sides of the same coin.

So let me give you my definition of diversity....

For me, diversity means that, whether it be in our careers or in our personal lives..

... or whether it be in the workplace or in society...

... each and every single one of us should enjoy the right to be different

.....**AND** the right to be equal.

In my view, that's the philosophy that should always be the hallmark of our profession.

And in my experience, if you want to see the practical embodiment of that philosophy, then look no further than our National Health Service.

More than a million workers – nurses, doctors, managers, porters and cleaners

- from every nation of the United Kingdom
- from right across mainland Europe
- from the Philippines and from South East Asia
- from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan
- from Australia and South Africa
- in fact, workers drawn from right around the globe.

A diverse range of people from a diverse range of backgrounds

But people who are bound together by shared values

People who are working together to achieve a common goal.

The NHS is multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and yet encompasses and expresses the very very best of British values.

Colleagues, we have a duty to stand up for, and speak out for, overseas nurses because, as the voice of nursing, we value every member of our nursing family

But, I'd also like to say this.....

..... we owe that same duty to every migrant worker and to every newcomer to our country

And that's because, as a Royal College **AND** a trade union, we believe in and should campaign for a society in which there is....

- Equality for all
- Justice for all

- Opportunity for all
- Inclusion for all
- Dignity for all
- And respect for all.....

...whatever your race, colour or religion.

...whatever your cultural background or social class

.....whatever your gender or your sexuality...

These are the principles that underpin our good practice guidance on international recruitment

These are the common values that unite every member of our nursing family.....

...these are the touchstones that make me proud to be President of the RCN

### Conclusions

Colleagues, five hundred years ago the Italian philosopher Machiavelli wrote:

"there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to **take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.**"

Well in our work to develop our IN guidelines...

...and in our efforts to stand up for and speak out for newcomers to our shores...

... the RCN has shown the courage to lead the way and the wisdom to call for a new order of things.

I believe that the RCN has a track record on these issues which is second to none

And I suppose that shouldn't come as a surprise

After all, not only is our General Secretary an African American migrant worker...

...but, as nurses, we are all the children of a Jamaican woman who, a century and a half ago, came to Britain and changed our profession and our country for the better....

I'm talking of course about the great Mary Seacole

And colleagues, I'm sure that, had she been here today, she'd have been proud of the work we are doing....

...and confident of the positive change that, through this work, we can and will bring about.

Thank you

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