

## **Patience or patients : An update on the Nurses Strikes**

Their wait lists are long, hospitals are short on staff and the quality of their work isn't getting any better. In the words of the General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, 'The NHS is the bedrock of modern Britain and it is crumbling'.

"I would love to find you someone to talk to, but barely anyone is in and those who are, really don't have the time," says the receptionist at the Royal College of Nursing. The notice board opposite her desk which is cluttered with fliers and notices, and the stand frame below it showcasing a letter to the prime minister from General Secretary Pat Cullen, all make the same point made laboriously by many others.

Over the years, burgeoning workloads due to lack of staff and funding have affected the physical and mental wellbeing of nurses working in Britain's National Health Service. Katy, a nurse who picks up shifts at hospitals on a no contract basis, is one of the many who jumped ship after realizing that it wasn't a viable career anymore.

Katy's union managed to scrap the 1 per cent pay rise cap for nurses in 2018, and even though she knows colleagues who are still struggling to pay the bills, she sees the strikes as more of a humane necessity than a financial one. "When you're working in other jobs like retail and you get moved to another store, you're probably not going to kill anyone," says Katy, "But in healthcare; you're just a number and they don't bother about the level of knowledge because they're so short on staff."

Although the strikes aim to rectify these problems, they have left others in their wake; particularly for patients, who have become what Katy describes as 'just tasks that you have to tick off your list'.

For Amber, a university student, her diagnosis was the least of her worries. After she began showing symptoms of Celiac disease late last year, Amber was able to take a blood test within a week and the earliest endoscopy appointment available was in February. Upon calling the hospital regarding another matter, she was told that all non-urgent appointments were postponed due to difficulties with staffing. "I'm still suffering from the symptoms and I've missed a lot of classes," says Amber, "The appointment has now been moved to late April and I have exams in May, it's a bit worrying."

While the Prime Minister's recent announcements address the lack of funding and equipment, many worry that staffing vacancies have been overlooked; a lot of which have been caused by overworked nurses who are now in need of healthcare themselves. "We're not immune to being unhealthy, people need to remember that," says Katy, who says the job left her 'feeling poorly'. "Unfortunately, it's not new that you can't deliver all the care that you need to."