

## Welcome to the Patients Association Weekly News



### Impact of pension and tax rules on the NHS workforce



The British Medical Association (BMA) has this week [issued guidance](#) for NHS consultant doctors, explaining how reducing their hours could lead to an increased pension under new tax rules.

Concerns have previously been raised that recent changes to the pension tax regime were encouraging doctors to reduce the amount they worked. New rules introduced in 2016 restricts the amount of tax relief available to those with an income over £110,000, reducing it from £40,000 to £10,000. This means NHS staff who accidentally breach the cap can be hit with bills of tens of thousands of pounds.

The BMA said consultants had no option but to substantially reduce their hours or take early retirement, adding that this would 'inevitably' have an impact on patients. A graph in the BMA's guidance document showed how a 40-year-old consultant could increase their annual pension by more than £5,000 if they halved their weekly workload.

John Kell, Head of Policy at the Patients Association, said:

"Setting a tax policy that incentivises doctors to do less work for the NHS at a time of chronic staff shortages can only be described as an epic fail. With patients facing ever longer waits for surgery and other treatment, an even greater shortage of doctors is the very last thing they need. This problem might arise from dry-as-dust tax and pension technicalities, but it could well have serious human consequences. The Treasury must sort this out as a matter of urgency."

You can read more about this story [here](#).

[Read more](#)

## Speaking up for patients



The Patients Association has a national media profile and provides comment on behalf of patients on a range of issues across the health and social care. You may recently have seen the Patients Association mentioned in these stories:

### NHS fraud crackdown sees millions in fines dished out to people eligible for free treatment

Vulnerable patients have been [wrongly fined millions](#) of pounds by the NHS for prescription fraud, the National Audit Office has found. One in three fines handed to elderly people, disabled people or people on benefits in the past five years has been overturned because the patients qualified for free treatment.

John Kell, Head of Policy at the Patients Association, said:

"This report seems to show the NHS scrabbling ever more desperately for cash over the last few years, and inflicting needless distress on patients. Receiving letters out of the blue that threaten court action is alarming and distressing for many patients, and is not how the NHS should be treating people who are innocent of any wrongdoing. It's essential that the NHS stops slapping fines on patients who have done nothing wrong, and improves its efficiency by concentrating on genuine, serial offenders." Read more [here](#).

### £17m NHS Bill after 100s of patients have wrong body part operated on

The NHS has spent [£17 million in six years](#) dealing with cases where patients have had the wrong part of their body operated on. Between 2012 and 2018, 202 patients claimed compensation from the health service following "wrong site surgery" – an invasive procedure on the wrong body part. Of the £17m paid out, £11.3m was paid to patients in damages. The rest was spent on defence costs and covering claimant costs.

Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association, said:

"People who suffer harm because of mistakes can suffer serious physical and psychological effects for the rest of their lives, and that should never happen to anyone who seeks treatment from the NHS. Each incident of this nature puts patients at avoidable risk of harm. While the NHS is under significant pressure, these incidents should not occur if the available preventative measures are implemented." Read more [here](#).

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## Medical examiner training session - giving the patient perspective



A national network of medical examiners was recommended by the Shipman, Mid-Staffordshire and Morecambe Bay public inquiries, with the system of medical examiners introduced in April 2019. Medical examiners ensure accurate death certification, ensure the correct cases are referred to the coroner, and provide much-needed support for bereaved families. Medical examiners can be senior doctors from any specialty, so long as they complete 26 separate training modules online and attend face-to-face training.

Patients Association Trustee, Dr Anna-Maria Rollin, attended a training session for medical examiners in London this week, sharing the patient perspective with doctors. Dr Rollin spoke about how bereaved families value a prompt and open conversation with an independent medical examiner following the death of a loved one. She also highlighted discussed how to approach interactions with bereaved people, including faith considerations, and the death of a child.

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## Get involved: Influence care through the RCS's Patient and Lay Group



The Royal College of Surgeons (RCS), the organisation promoting and advancing standards of surgical care for patients, is [inviting applications](#) from individuals to sit on its Patient and Lay Group (PLG). This is an exciting opportunity to join one of the oldest and most prestigious medical royal colleges, and to influence care for surgical patients.

The PLG promotes the care of surgical patients by influencing the RCS and its members, policies, and standards. It provides an independent patient and lay view on issues relevant to surgery and healthcare. PLG members act as a critical friend to the College, providing the patient voice at meetings, contributing to responses to consultations on issues affecting patients, raising areas of patient concern and advising on the best ways to engage patients.

Candidates should be able to demonstrate previous experience and interest in working in health-related areas. The appointment is for three years, renewable for a further two. To apply, send a CV and covering letter to [plg@rcseng.ac.uk](mailto:plg@rcseng.ac.uk) by Friday 24 May 2019. More information can be found [here](#).

[More information](#)

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## Survey: Tell us about your experiences of unsafe, premature discharge





Have you completed our latest [survey](#) on unsafe discharge from hospital?

We want to hear about times when someone has been discharged from hospital despite not being well enough to leave. If the person suffered harm as a result of this, or was at a real risk of harm, it was an unsafe discharge.

Too little research has been done on discharges that simply happened too early, even though we hear about this from callers to our helpline. If you think your experience, or the experience of someone close to you, matches this description of an unsafe, premature discharge, please [share your experiences with us](#) in this short survey.

We will be issuing a report, based on what people tell us. The survey should take around seven minutes to complete. Share your views [here](#).

[Complete the survey](#)

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## Patient's Choice Awards - voting now open



[Voting is now open](#) to choose the winner of one of nursing's most prestigious accolades: the Patient's Choice category of the RCNi Nurse Awards. The award, which is supported by the Patients Association, enables members of the public to thank a nurse, midwife, health visitor, healthcare assistant or assistant practitioner who has provided exceptional care. Voting is open to everyone.

Five inspirational nurses have been chosen as finalists this year from scores of nominations by patients. Those who nominated the finalists include a young woman diagnosed with cancer while at university and a teenager whose mental health worker has supported her towards recovery.

Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association, said:

"It was incredibly heart-warming to read patients' accounts describing how nurses have gone above and beyond the call of duty, and it was challenging to shortlist just five nurses for these prestigious awards. The commitment, care and dedication of these nurses to their patients is without question – it's now up to the public to make the difficult choice and decide who should be the winner."

Voting closes at midnight on 14 June, and the winner will be announced at the RCNi Nurse Awards ceremony in London on 3 July.

[Vote now](#)

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## From the helpline: social care and support for terminally ill patients



This week we were contacted by Joel\*, who got in touch about his wife's care arrangements. Joel's wife had a terminal illness and had recently been assessed by palliative care nurses. After the assessment, Joel was told that the palliative care team would arrange specialist healthcare assistants to visit his wife. However, the adult social care team referred Joel's wife to a care agency to receive an hour and a half of support at home each day. Joel, who had previously acted as his wife's main carer, was unhappy with these arrangements, and was also dissatisfied that the agency had arranged for a male staff member to support his wife with her personal care.

Joel called our helpline to find out what he could do about the situation.

Our helpline adviser informed Joel that he could raise his concerns with the palliative nurse team, the adult social care team or with the care agency directly, and any of these would be able to help to make the necessary arrangements. We also provided Joel with the details of a palliative care charity for him to receive further support.

A few days later, we got back in touch with Joel to see how his wife was doing, and if they had managed to resolve the issues about her care arrangements. Happily, Joel informed us that he had spoken to the palliative nurse team, and that they had been able to arrange specialist community female staff to care for his wife. Both he and his wife were happy with the new arrangements. Joel's wife was not in pain and has been receiving excellent care. We asked Joel to get back in touch if there was anything more we could do.

If you need advice or information about any aspect of health and social care, you can contact our helpline on 020 8423 8999, or email [helpline@patients-association.com](mailto:helpline@patients-association.com). You can find out more about our helpline and advice service [here](#).

\*Name has been changed

[Contact our helpline](#)



## What our team is reading this week

[GP pressure: Numbers show first sustained drop for 50 years](#)

[NHS nursing crisis worsened by Brexit exodus](#)

[Bereaved father leads NHS movement against suicide](#)

[One in five harmed by others drinking alcohol over past year, survey finds](#)

[Pharmacists sent into care homes amid fears pensioners are being put at risk by drugs cocktail](#)

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## About us

Our vision is that health and social care will be delivered in a way that meets every person's health and social care needs.

Our mission is to give effect to the patient voice, to improve patient experience and support people to engage fully in their own care. Find out more about our values on our [website](#).



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