

Jo Stephenson  
nt@emap.com

Anger at NHS reforms and funding cuts have driven a nurse to take up politics and stand in next month's European elections, she has told *Nursing Times*.

Kathryn Anderson, a nurse for 35 years, is standing as a National Health Action Party candidate for London.

She has been involved with the party since it was launched at the end of 2012 by doctors and other healthcare workers "to defend the NHS and its values".

High-profile members include Dr Richard Taylor, who famously won a seat in the Commons as independent MP for Wyre Forest on a ticket to oppose plans to downgrade Kidderminster Hospital.

In an interview with *Nursing Times*, Ms Anderson said: "I got involved in this just because I am so angry about what's happening."

She claimed the government was "systematically cutting funding to the NHS", when the health service was the "last place funding should be cut".

However, she told *Nursing Times* she never expected to become a political candidate. "If someone had told me two years ago I'd be doing this, I'd have laughed," she said. "I'm not a politician, I'm a nurse – and will always be a nurse."

She explained a key factor in her decision to put herself forward as a prospective MEP was the "power" of social media website Twitter, where she read about the day-to-day difficulties faced by nurses.

"You get a lot of really sad

## Nurse "stands for NHS" in elections



Kathryn Anderson with fellow candidate, junior doctor Alex Ashman

accounts of what people go through every single day at work," she said. "To me, the whole focus of the NHS should always be what happens at the bedside with patient care, but it feels like things are going backwards."

Ms Anderson said she was well placed to observe changes in the NHS, having spent a number of years in roles outside nursing, including as an inspector for the Healthcare Commission – a forerunner of the Care Quality Commission. She returned to frontline care in June last year as a lead nurse in pain management at a large, unnamed north London hospital.

**"To me, the whole focus of the NHS should always be what happens at the bedside with patient care"**

Kathryn Anderson

She said it was important for the NHS to "have a strong voice" in the European Parliament because of the European Union's powerful influence over UK policy, which could include regulations on staffing levels and nurse-to-patient ratios in the future.

"It is possible that this sort

of thing may come out of the EU and we may need to abide by those regulations and, if we don't have a say in that, then we have missed the boat," she said.

While she was keen to raise awareness of general issues facing the NHS, she said the main thrust of the party's European election campaign was to ensure it was exempt from a transatlantic trade deal between the EU and the US.

"The agreement on the table would enable any US company to buy up any part of any public service in the UK that the government

wants to sell, so it's very much our focus to have the NHS exempt from that agreement," she told *Nursing Times*. "The effect it could have if the NHS is not exempt is really quite frightening."

She said most people she spoke to were "completely unaware" of the deal – known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Ms Anderson said the public's response to the party out on the campaign trail had been "really good because people know the NHS and what it means". She hoped it would inspire more nurses to get actively involved in politics.

"Generally, nurses aren't really interested in politics because they're much more

**"Some trusts are not conducting proper assessments of midwifery staffing requirements"**

Cathy Warwick  
p4



concerned about what's happening with their patients," she said. "This party has been set up by healthcare professionals – so hopefully it has made nurses see they can get involved in politics and try and make a difference to what is happening."

Other nurses involved in frontline politics in recent years include former health ministers Anne Milton, Conservative MP for Guildford since 2005, and Ann Keen, Labour MP for Brentford and Isleworth from 1997 to 2010. Another former nurse, Nadine Dorries, Conservative MP for Mid Bedfordshire, was a member of the health select committee in 2010-11.

Ms Anderson was due to attend a rally being held by the party in Borough, in south London, on Sunday, while the Royal College of Nursing was holding its own hustings event on Tuesday.

The RCN has drawn up a manifesto, calling on election candidates to back policies to support nursing staff and ensure the best-quality care. The college's priorities include championing "safe and transparent levels of staffing in safe and healthy workplaces" and ensuring an "appropriately educated, regulated and developed EU nursing workforce".

The elections will be held on 22 May. The results will be decided under a system of proportional representation in which the public votes for a party, not an individual.

The more votes a party receives, the more of its candidates will be elected up to a maximum of three to 10, depending on the region.

## HCA's set to receive training boost

Shaun Lintern  
shaun.lintern@emap.com

Millions of pounds more may be invested in training lower-paid NHS staff to help them progress into nursing and other professional roles.

Health Education England is considering boosting the proportion of the £5bn education and training budget it spends on staff in the lowest Agenda for Change bands by 1% a year for five years.

The move forms part of HEE's National Bands 1-4 Project, which was launched in October with the aim of improving opportunities for NHS career progression, especially for young people.

The education and training body is developing proposals for the strategy. These could include boosting the number of apprenticeships and creating "skills escalators" for all band 1-4 staff. This would allow some to access graduate programmes, leading to more joining professions such as nursing and midwifery.

Papers linked to the project, seen by *Nursing Times*' sister

title *Health Service Journal*, said: "As part of our development of this strategy, we would set an aim to increase the proportion of funding available for education and training for staff in posts banded 1-4.

"Realistically, this could be set at 1% growth each year for five years."

Health Education England has not clarified how much this would mean in cash terms, describing it as a "broad indication".

Stephen Welfare, managing director of Health Education East of England and national lead for the National Bands 1-4 Project, said no final decisions had yet been made on the strategy or funding.

Encouraging more staff from bands 1-4 into nursing is being seen as one way to help tackle a looming retirement bulge in nursing. A labour market review by the Royal College of Nursing in 2010 predicted 200,000 nurses could retire by 2020.

RCN head of policy Howard Catton said: "We would absolutely recognise there is a need for investment

in bands 1-4. However, it does raise some really important questions over the detail. I can't see how there would not be consequences for other [workforce] groups."

The 470,000 staff in bands 1-4 make up around 40% of the NHS' workforce of 1.4 million in England, and includes around 271,000 healthcare assistants.

In March, the government controversially announced plans for a nursing higher apprenticeship, which would be targeted at the "brightest and best" HCAs who may lack qualifications needed to do a nursing degree.

In addition, HEE and the Nursing and Midwifery Council are about to embark on a national review of education and training standards for nurses and HCAs (page 5).



## Rules vacuum leaves rosters open to ward politics

There is a need for clear policies on rostering that define staff levels, skill mix and shift patterns, according to a UK nursing study.

It found that the rules governing how nursing staff were scheduled were often "undocumented, tacit and informal", and warned that the roster process could be "highly politicised" on wards.

Robert Drake, an associate lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, contrasted the theoretical perceptions of roster constraints with the subjective, often political, rules governing rosters in practice.



Drawing up rosters can become "highly politicised" on wards

His four-year study examined rosters from 28 wards in 14 hospitals, comparing the number and types of unfilled shifts, and the rules defining roster and how often they were broken. He also interviewed senior

nurses and ward managers.

"Managers must understand that roster design has a major impact on ward performance and must develop clear roster policies that define staff levels, skill mix, shift patterns and the rules used in preparing the roster," Mr Drake stated in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

He added: "In practice, rostering nursing staff is often unrecognised, unrewarded and undervalued. Yet, despite four decades of research, operations management has little to offer in terms of faster, safer, fairer or more effective rosters."