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NEWS

Voluntary retirement from the NHS: do you understand why nurses want an early exit?

Kimberley Hackett - @kj_hackett

Posted 26 August 2021 - 16:13



Upward trend over past decade reveals extent of nurse retention challenge for employers in the NHS



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The figure has prompted workforce experts to call for renewed focus on retaining experienced older staff.

Data obtained by Nursing Standard show 3,894 nurses, health visitors, midwives and physiotherapists took early retirement between April 2020 and March 2021, compared to 2,292 in 2010-2011.

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Nurse and other staff take-up of voluntary early retirement from the NHS

Numbers of NHS nurses, health visitors, midwives and physiotherapists who took voluntary early retirement in England and Wales by year

- 2007/2008* - 1,220
- 2008/2009 - 1,401
- 2009/2010 - 1,756
- 2010/2011 - 2,292
- 2011/2012 - 2,743
- 2012/2013 - 3,250
- 2013/2014 - 3,847
- 2014/2015 - 4,614
- 2015/2016 - 4,675
- 2016/2017 - 4,570
- 2017/2018 - 4,584
- 2018/2019 - 4,547
- 2019/2020 - 4,537
- 2020/2021 - 3,894



Employer focus on understanding staff profile

James Buchan, professor in the school of health sciences at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, says stemming loss of older nurses in the NHS is one of the UK's main nursing workforce challenges.

'The starting point must be that the employing organisation has a good understanding of the profile, needs and expectations of the nurses they employ and aspire to employ, irrespective of the nurses' age.

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'Part of the process of developing these policies must be an understanding of age profile, participation rates by age and related factors, and an overall approach based on avoidance of age discrimination.'

Voluntary early retirement from the NHS – how it works

It is when you retire before the NHS pension's normal pension age.

Your pension is reduced to reflect the fact you are drawing on it ahead of the normal pension age, on the basis it is potentially payable for longer.

Your normal pension age depends on which NHS pension scheme you are in:

- **1995 scheme** Age 60

Note: Nurses who were members of the NHS Pension scheme on or



- **2008 scheme** Age 65
- **2015 scheme** It is the same age as your state pension age, or age 65 if that is later

(Source: [NHS Business Services Authority](#))

Workplace policies that meet older nurses' needs

A 2020 global review backed by the International Council of Nurses drew up a ten-point plan for supporting older members of the workforce, citing shift patterns that meet older nurses' needs, adequate pay and avoidance of age bias in recruitment as important.

King's Fund assistant director of policy Alex Baylis said he hoped a slight fall in numbers of people taking voluntary early retirement from 2018 and 2021 (see table) was a sign of staffing wanting to remain in the NHS, and not a result of retirement being unaffordable.

And he emphasised the importance of flexible working in staff retention – from September, nurses and other NHS staff in England, Wales and Scotland will be able to make unlimited flexible working requests.

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