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75 years of the NHS: 'nurses will fight for its survival'



Alison Stacey - @alibaabra

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Dedication and commitment of nurses is what sustains the health service, says RCN chief, and staffing crisis needs to be addressed if it is to continue



Pat Cullen, second from left, on the picket line at St Thomas' Hospital in London in December

2022 Picture: John Houlihan

The NHS has survived for 75 years thanks to the 'dedication, compassion and commitment' of its nurses, who will continue to fight for it, the RCN has said.

Speaking in an interview to mark the health service's landmark anniversary, RCN general secretary Pat Cullen said that while the NHS cares for everyone in society, it could do more to care for its own nursing staff.

Nurses will fight for the future of the NHS, pledges RCN chief

Ms Cullen said nurses on the front line have described a service 'crumbling at the seams' due to 'neglect and constant cuts' over the past decade. But she vowed that nurses will continue to

fight for the NHS so it still remains in another 75 years.

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'There absolutely wouldn't be a health service without nurses. They're the backbone of the NHS and I would describe them as the beating heart of the NHS,' Ms Cullen told PA news agency.

'I think the NHS has survived because of the dedication, the compassion and the commitment of nursing staff. There's no doubt if you look at our health service, and it is sad to think we're celebrating 75 years being in such a state that it is in.

'In recent weeks I have spoken to hundreds of nurses. Their feeling of sadness about the state of the NHS is palpable. The NHS deserves much more. It deserves to be nurtured and looked after and treated as the incredible institution that it is and was set up to be.'

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Addressing staffing crisis vital if NHS is to survive

Asked if the health service would still be around to celebrate its 150-year anniversary she said: 'If nurses have anything to do with it, you definitely will have an NHS for the next 75 years. And that's why it is so important to address the crisis that we've got within our nursing profession.'

There are 40,000 nursing vacancies in the NHS in England alone. The long-awaited NHS workforce plan, published last week, sets out targets for boosting nurse numbers and retaining existing staff in the coming years, but has been criticised over the lack of detail on points such as how university places for nursing students will be expanded.

The plan was announced after [further industrial action by RCN members](#) in their dispute over pay and working conditions was ruled out last week.

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