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NHS Tayside staffing : Three facts and an admission

Three significant NHS staffing figures were published last month and one highly significant admission was made.

*The latest official government figures show that the number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside continues to remain below the level it was at when Alex Salmond's SNP Government took over in 2007.

*The overall NHS workforce in NHS Tayside is now over 300 less than it was two years ago .

*Around 1 out of 4 student nurses in abandon their courses.

and

Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon finally admitted that the number of nurses and midwifery staff in the NHS in Scotland is now lower than the number was under Labour.

Let's look at the first fact.

The latest official government figures show that numbers of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside continue to fall under Alex Salmond's SNP Government.

They remain at a level below the number of nursing and midwifery posts in the health board when the SNP came into government in 2007.

It's now 23 whole-time equivalents in staffing numbers below what the figures were back then.

The headcount figure is also down on the 2007 level.

This trend stacks up poorly against the record of the previous Labour-led Scottish Executive.

In the last 4 years, under Labour from 2002-2006, the number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside increased each year , and increased in total by over 230.

Let's look at the second fact again now.

The overall number of NHS staff in NHS Tayside is now over 300 less than it was two years ago .

Today there are 13,914 staff in the health board, including GPs and dentists, (using the SNP Government's preferred choice of headcount figures.)

This is a decrease of almost 320 from the 14,230 staff level reported two years ago.

This trend also stacks up poorly against the record of the previous Labour-led Scottish Executive.

In its last 4 years, under Labour, the overall number of staff in NHS Tayside increased each year and increased in total by 1,100.

These figures were already expected because of the SNP Government's failure to match the Labour-led Scottish Executive's growth in health spending.

The third fact is that the number of nursing students who drop out of their courses, known as the "attrition rate" still affects around 1 in 4.

The reasons for this are well-known and long-standing and include the need for childcare assistance and better support for clinical placements as well as financial difficulties and problems with career prospects.

This last issue, career prospects, now looks like taking on a greater significance.

In terms of demand, as the population ages there will be more need for nursing staff

In term of supply, there is a need to replace an ageing NHS workforce with younger staff .

Some 10,000 of Scotland's nursing workforce are now over 55

In addition more of them are needed to meet the rising demand from the elderly.

However, student nurses can now see their career opportunities being restricted as the number of nursing posts in the NHS in Scotland falls - 2,000 lost in the past year, and so these diminishing career prospects will create anxiety, disquiet and perhaps a career re-decision.

And what of the highly significant admission ?

Earlier last month, (10th. November) Nicola Sturgeon finally admitted to the Scottish Parliament, the SNP's failure on nursing numbers which are now below those under Labour.

She stated,

“The number of nurses and midwives has reduced by 0.2 per cent from the level that we inherited. “

No Government or health secretary can afford to have declining health staff numbers , particularly when you have previously declaimed that you “ will protect the health service during the lifetime of this Parliament “ with fewer nursing and midwifery staff.

Why is the NHS in this condition ?

The SNP Government simply just pass on cuts from the Tory Government in Westminster.

Furthermore, more money being spent on the SNP’s populist 5-year council tax freeze means of course less money for spending on the health service.

As a consequence of greater and greater duties being demanded with no increase in resources for the NHS in Scotland, several career options for loyal staff such as voluntary redundancy packages have their appeal.

This, however, result in a further loss of nursing skills, with overworked and under-pressure dedicated staff remaining.

The extent of this working environment is revealed in a new poll of its members by the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland where more than 1 in 3 said that there were discouraged or told not to report their concerns over issues such as staffing levels or patient safety.

When RCN Scotland appeared before the Scottish Parliament’s Health and Sport Committee last month, their observation resonated with many :

“Nurses think they are very much on their own and that they are being targeted for savings.....Nursing has lost a sense of all being in it together.”