Organisations condemn anti-vaxxer attacks on health staff

Health organisations including the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), public services union UNISON and the NHS Confederation have spoken out against abuse directed at health workers, following online attacks and threats directed at the RCM’s chief executive Gill Walton.

She came under attack after backing advice from the chief midwifery officer for England and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that pregnant women should get vaccinated against Covid. She made the appeal after data showed the overwhelming majority of pregnant women hospitalised with the virus had not had a jab, and that no pregnant women with both doses of the vaccine had been admitted to hospital.

In response she was made the victim of comments from anti-vaxxers such as: “When we take our countries back from the Covid Nazis, I hope scum like this will face trial before the mob of grieving mothers get their hands on them.”

Following the attacks she received what the RCM calls an “outpouring of support”. It said that the backing for her has been remarkable, with politicians including Sajid Javid, other health organisations and the public stepping forward to shout down those who hurl abuse from the shadows of social media.

Gill Walton commented: “Over the past 16 months, health and care workers have been working under incredible stress, with increased demands and less staff because of the pandemic. Yet still they have strived to provide the best possible care.

“I know the vast majority of the public are incredibly grateful for that dedication and commitment. However, too many health and care workers have faced abuse from a small but vocal minority, from Covid deniers to anti-vaxxers.

“Our midwives, doctors, nurses, porters, cleaners, everyone working for the NHS, has the right to safety and respect in the workplace. To those who abuse us for simply making polite requests to wear masks or maintain social distance in hospitals or...
GP practices, to those who deny the existence of the pandemic or the science of vaccination, to those who issue death threats or incite violence against us, we say enough is enough.”

A letter about standing up to abuse which was signed by the RCM and other health organisations including UNISON, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, NHS Confederation, British Medical Association, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, and the Royal College of Nursing was published in The Times newspaper this week, while the RCM has also used the hashtag #IStandWithGill to highlight the abuse health and care staff experience every day.

Separately, doctors’ union the BMA released the results of a survey which showed that more than a third of doctors have faced recent abuse from patients, or those close to them – with the figure even higher for GPs, with half reporting having experienced verbal abuse.

Key findings of the survey of over 2,400 doctors in England, Wales and Northern Ireland included:

- more than a third (37%) of all respondents had experienced verbal abuse first-hand in the most recent month – including 51% of GPs and 30% of hospital doctors;
- one in five GPs reported being threatened;
- half of respondents (51%) had witnessed violence or abuse against other staff, which rose to 67% for doctors working in general practice;
- hospital doctors were most likely to report abuse of nurses (87%) or other doctors (65%), while in general practice, 96% of those who had seen colleagues face abuse said this was directed at reception staff; and
- two-thirds of GPs (67%) said their experience of abuse, threatening behaviour or violence had got worse in the last year.

A female GP partner in the South West of England described her experiences: “In just the last week I have been shouted at because I asked someone to do a PCR test for their new cough and fever, and was called the most horrifically offensive name after I asked someone not to come into the surgery waiting room with a cough, and instead asked them to come to our onsite ‘hot clinic’ where people with Covid symptoms can be seen safely.

“These behaviours are causing staff members, from receptionists to nurses and GPs, to want to quit. Our local practice managers are so distressed by the unrelenting complaints and poor behaviour that they are leaving in droves. The social contract that general practice prides itself on being built on seems to have broken down and people think it’s ok to be rude and unkind.”

Dr Richard Vautrey, BMA GP committee chair, commented: “There must be an honest public conversation, led by the government and NHS England, about the precarious state the NHS now finds itself in after 18 months of managing a pandemic, so that people have realistic expectations, and to prevent staff bearing the brunt of frustration and anger.”

https://www.rcm.org.uk/media-releases/2021/july/health-organisations-stand-together-against-abuse

---

Energy price hike to hit poorest hardest

The GMB general union has condemned this week’s rise in the Ofgem energy price cap as “more evidence of the UK’s increasingly shambolic energy and industrial policies”. The move will pile pressure on the poorest households while increasing our dependence on energy imports, it added.

Ofgem announced that the energy price cap will increase from 1 October for the 15 million customers it protects. Those on default tariffs paying by direct debit will see an increase of £139, from £1,138 to £1,277. Prepayment customers will see an increase of £153, from £1,156 to £1,309.

Gary Smith, GMB general secretary, had spoken out ahead of Ofgem’s announcement to warn that a rise would be “a recipe for failure, not just for jobs and consumers, but also for the UK’s security of supply and our net zero ambitions.”

Think tank the Resolution Foundation agreed, pointing out that over one in five families on Universal Credit is already falling behind on essential bills, and that low-income families face a “perfect storm” of higher prices for essentials, an end to the planned £20 a week Universal Credit uplift, and the threat of rising unemployment.

Jonathan Marshall, senior economist at the foundation, said: “This is the second price cap increase in six months, with a previous 9% increase in energy costs last April driven, like this one, by rising.
fossil fuel prices. Going forwards, the government must spearhead a successful, permanent switch to cheaper, renewable energy sources - ensuring that this switch is done in a way that minimises the impact on those already in fuel poverty, or at risk of falling into fuel poverty.

"In addition, policymakers must focus on widening the current warm homes discount scheme, reversing the removal of the £20 Universal Credit uplift, and identifying and offering targeted support to families at risk of falling into fuel poverty."


UK ‘missing boat’ on renewables jobs

The Prospect union, which represents workers in renewables and across the energy industry, has warned that the UK “risks missing the boat” on renewables jobs unless government draws up a strategy for employment in the sector.

Office for National Statistics figures show that 33,800 direct jobs and 41,000 indirect jobs were lost in the low carbon and renewable sectors between 2014 and 2019.

Prospect senior deputy general secretary Sue Ferns said: “The renewables sector continues to be plagued by policy uncertainty, off-shoring, and a drive for low costs, all of which mean we risk missing out on the huge strategic opportunity to convert clean energy into green jobs. Other countries like Denmark are getting this right, generating five jobs for every MW of renewable energy compared to just one in the UK.

"With far more clean energy infrastructure needed in the coming years to achieve net zero, it is urgent that government grip this problem and put in place a strategy for developing UK renewables jobs, otherwise we will miss the huge economic opportunity presented by this green industrial revolution.”


Education unions congratulate students

Education unions have welcomed the release of vocational and technical qualification and A-level results this week.

Dr Mary Bousted, NEU joint general secretary, said:
"Congratulations to all students for their achievements this year and all the hard work that their teachers have done to make this possible.

But, she added, "We strongly condemn the government’s decision to de-fund Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) which include BTECs and Cam Techs. Scrapping these qualifications would massively impact disadvantaged students who for many years have used these qualifications to progress to higher education and into employment."

Paul Whiteman, NAHT general secretary, commented: “All students receiving their results this week deserve our congratulations. This is the culmination of a huge amount of work in the most challenging of circumstances. Students have shown great resilience and determination this year. For each individual student, their grades are a passport to the next phase of their education, training or employment.”

“The challenges of the awarding process this year were significantly exacerbated by minister’s delay in drawing up contingency plans,” NASUWT general secretary Dr Patrick Roach stated.

“Whilst schools have done a tremendous job in picking up the pieces left [by] minister’s last-minute decision-making, many teachers were left running on empty with teacher workload at breaking point at the end of last term. We cannot afford a repeat of this confusion and chaos for yet another year.”

For the ASCL, general secretary Geoff Barton congratulated students receiving their results, adding: “They deserve huge credit as do leaders and teachers who have worked with great professionalism and commitment to support their students throughout the pandemic and to then assess them for these important qualifications following the government’s decision to cancel public exams for the second year in a row.”

The UCU said that the “bumper exam results” must lead to a pay rise. The union also criticised the withdrawal of funding from BTECs. General secretary Jo Grady said: “Thousands of students who receive their level 3 BTEC qualifications will now be able to enter higher education. Many will be the first in their families to do so. BTECs are a crucial entry route into university for those from working class backgrounds, yet the government wants to scrap them.”

Human resources professionals’ institute the CIPD has launched a campaign to boost youth employment and remedy the damage done to young people’s job prospects by the pandemic.

The One Million Chances campaign aims to persuade employers to create opportunities for 18 to 30 year olds through jobs, internships, work experience, apprenticeships T-Levels or the Kickstart scheme.

In support of the initiative, the CIPD pointed to a survey that found 43% of 2,064 young people questioned felt the pandemic had harmed their long-term career prospects.

It also found that one in 10 (14%) young people not in work had applied for more than 30 jobs in the last three months. The organisation also quoted official figures which showed there were 166,000 fewer young people (16-24) in the UK in employment in June 2021 (3.7 million) compared with March 2020 (3.9 million).

An NHS trust has signed up to a TUC initiative that supports workers who have a terminal illness.

Together with trade unions representing staff working for its services, the Stockport NHS Foundation Trust has signed the Dying to Work Charter.

UNISON Stockport Health Branch secretary and healthcare assistant David McAllister said: “Every person battling terminal conditions deserves the choice of how to spend their final months. When staff are faced with such a tough diagnosis, we are committed to ensuring that they are treated with respect in a supportive work environment.”