

## Katie Davis of the Royal College of Nurses (UK) on Organising Young Nurses



### **9th EPSU Congress, 20 - 23 May 2014 - Toulouse - Day 4**

(Tuesday, May 27, 2014) On Friday, the Congress discussed and debated trade union organising. It's clear that to build unions for the future there must be a focus on recruitment, especially on young people. We spoke to Katie Davis, member of the student committee of the British nurses' organisation, the Royal College of Nurses (RCN), on why it's important for young nurses to be involved in their union.

The RCN has the advantage of being able to attract young members not only with the representation and protection of a union, but also with access to professional training and material which is very attractive to nursing students who are looking for ways to support their studies. The RCN also attracts young recruits by having a student structure that is well integrated into the workings of the union. Being in the

RCN makes young nurses more aware of the political issues facing the profession, such as pay freezes and threats of privatisation.

The main challenge for nurses in the UK, according to Katie, is that they are simply not being afforded the time they need to care for their patients. In the UK, nurses have a wide base of responsibilities, so when, due to staff shortages or reorganisation, nurses do not have enough time for each patient, care is substantially effected. The RCN has met the problem head on by launching the 'Frontline First' and 'Time to Care' campaigns aimed at highlighting cuts in jobs and services and giving members a platform to raise concern in their workplaces.

Katie also highlighted the possible risk of a future skills gap in the profession, as employers are increasingly demanding master-level qualifications for certain positions, whilst funding and availability for nursing education is being whittled away. This is strange, considering that the recent Willis report into nursing education praised the high quality of nursing education and said that nurses organisations need to 'stand up and be counted' on the challenges facing healthcare. Yet the government's response, unfortunately, did not reflect these conclusions.

To coin a phrase, the youth are our future, or rather student nurses are the future of the profession. RCN has a network of student information officers who provide a point of contact for students that really facilitate student involvement in the organisation. These kind of dedicated structures and emphasis on recruiting young workers are the kind of strategies that are starting to be used throughout public service unions to organise and build. There are clearly differences between the challenges facing nursing organisations and unions in, say, government administration, but RCN could provide some example of best practice about how best to involve young people in unions.

[Watch a short video interview with Katie on the EPSU YouTube channel.](#)

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