

Statement of the Save South Tyneside Hospital Campaign on the Nurses Pay Upsurge

On Saturday, August 8 Nurses and health care workers, supported by health campaigners and many supporters will hold a physically distanced march from the Royal Victoria Infirmary through Newcastle for a rally at the Monument. This is part of nationwide protests by nurses and health care workers throughout the country in some 30 cities and towns.

This follows on from Wednesday, July 29, when thousands of nurses and other care and health workers marched through London to Downing Street demanding a wage rise and a stop to the attacks on the NHS, with the organisers of the demonstration demanding "No! to public sector inequality and pay justice."

Nurses and other health workers are speaking in their own name and taking up the fight, both to improve their own pay, and at the same time to take part in the struggle to safeguard the future of the NHS and care services.

Since the hypocrisy of Boris Johnson and the government has been exposed in clapping health and care workers one day and omitting them from a wage rise the next, nurses have been expressing their anger on social media and in other forums. Now they are taking to the streets, supported by doctors and others, in a series of marches and demonstrations.

In our discussions, SSTHC highlighted statements of very angry nurses that showed it was not just about the pay but the whole neglect of the welfare of all health staff. At the same time, they have had to endure constant attacks on the NHS, increased privatisation, staffing cuts, the cutting of student nurse bursaries and the promotion of commercialisation being put above patient care. Also discussed, was that health workers are struggling from the imposition of austerity, as so many working people and unemployed people are as well. Some health workers are having to use food banks to eat, and struggling to pay their bills after years of real-terms pay cuts finished off by a disastrous three-year low pay deal that again left many more experienced nurses worse off. Nurses have lost as much as 20% of their pay in real terms over the last 10 years. This has driven many to leave, unable to endure the stress of attempting to deliver patient care to the level they know should be offered to all as of a right.

Right from the beginning, nurses, care workers and others in many different groups have made it clear that they support those in public service receiving a wage increase, and they also know that many of these services are also being cut to fund so-called "wage rises". They have also expressed opposition to the Trade Bill and other attacks on the NHS by the government. This is a government that has used the Covid-19 crisis to further line the pockets of private health monopolies and other private companies such as Serco and Deloitte, whilst continuing with planned closures to hospitals and A&Es, together with downgrading services throughout the crisis. These are services that are vital in delivering healthcare to the people, the downgrading of which had resulted in many unnecessary deaths.

What this new upsurge of nurses and care workers reflects is that what is being done to undermine their pay and conditions and the NHS is certainly not in their name. As one experienced nurse who had worked through the Covid-19 crisis put it in our SSTHC discussion : "The nurses and other care workers are now speaking out in their name for a new future that upholds and guarantees their well-being as part of guaranteeing the right of all to healthcare at the highest standard society can achieve. This is not some future dream. This is what the authorities should address now, and nurses and health care workers should be empowered to make the decisions in the future for a new, human-centred healthcare system for our NHS, our hospitals, our community and mental health services and our workplaces."