



## RCN Foundation Call for applications

### ***Research into Nurses' and Midwives' experiences of effective leadership strategies whilst practicing during the COVID-19 pandemic***

#### **Introduction**

The RCN Foundation is an independent charity (1134606 – England and Wales, SC043663 – Scotland) and a company limited by guarantee (7026001). It was set up in 2010 and aims to support and strengthen nursing and midwifery to improve the health and well-being of the public. The Foundation delivers its purpose by:

- **Supporting** individual members of the nursing team (nurses, midwives and health care support workers) by providing grants for hardship and education purposes
- **Investing** in the nursing profession to improve patient care by funding research and clinical projects in our priority areas of care homes, children and young people's mental health, and learning disability nursing
- **Championing** nursing by raising the profile of the profession and public understanding of its contribution to improving the nation's health

#### **Background**

From March 2020 onwards, the RCN Foundation has been responding to the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of this response saw the Foundation commission reports into the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives during the initial wave of the pandemic.

The impact of nursing and midwifery leadership strategies on the professions' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, was identified as having a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of nursing and midwifery staff during the initial phase of the pandemic. The need for effective leadership strategies was also demonstrated through an analysis of the evidence base underpinning the professions' response to the pandemic.

The roles of leaders and managers during the pandemic have been highlighted as being particularly important to the psychological wellbeing of the nursing and midwifery team (Maben and Bridges, 2020). There is a need to develop guidelines which establish better mental health and wellbeing support for nurses and nursing, and includes a specific focus on effective leadership strategies at all levels within the professions (Maben and Bridges, 2020).



Towards the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19, the RCN Foundation commissioned The King's Fund to report on the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives throughout the pandemic. *The Courage of Compassion* (The King's Fund, 2020) identified eight key recommendations to support the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives moving forward. These were:

***Key recommendation 1: Authority, empowerment and influence***

Introduce mechanisms for nursing and midwifery staff to shape the cultures and processes of their organisations and influence decisions about how care is structured and delivered.

***Key recommendation 2: Justice and fairness***

Nurture and sustain just, fair and psychologically safe cultures and ensure equity, proactive and positive approaches to diversity and universal inclusion.

***Key recommendation 3: Work conditions and working schedules***

Introduce minimum standards for facilities and working conditions for nursing and midwifery staff in all health and care organisations.

***Key recommendation 4: Teamworking***

Develop and support effective multidisciplinary teamworking for all nursing and midwifery staff across health and care services.

***Key recommendation 5: Culture and leadership***

Ensure health and care environments have compassionate leadership and nurturing cultures that enable both care and staff support to be high-quality, continually improving and compassionate.

***Key recommendation 6: Workload***

Tackle chronic excessive work demands in nursing and midwifery, which exceed the capacity of nurses and midwives to sustainably lead and deliver safe, high-quality care and which damage their health and wellbeing.

***Key recommendation 7: Management and supervision***

Ensure all nursing and midwifery staff have the effective support, professional reflection, mentorship and supervision needed to thrive in their roles.

***Key recommendation 8: Learning, education and development***

Ensure the right systems, frameworks and processes are in place for nurses' and midwives' learning, education and development throughout their careers. These must promote fair and equitable outcomes.

The report examined the workplace stressors, organisational cultures, working contexts and leadership styles that impact on nurse and midwife wellbeing and mental health, both prior to and during COVID-19 across the four countries of the UK. The King's Fund (2020) recommended an integrated, coherent strategic approach to meeting these needs and set out how this would transform the working lives of nurses and midwives, their productivity and effectiveness, and thereby the safety and quality of the care that they lead and deliver.



Also identified within the report was a need to move away from a traditional command-and-control leadership style within nursing, towards a model of inclusive, compassionate, and collective leadership style. The report highlighted how those leaders with expertise, capability and motivation, listen to staff and work together to develop a shared and empathetic and supportive understanding of the challenges faced.

Presented within the report were examples of effective leadership strategies within the nursing and midwifery professions which have come to fruition during the COVID-19 pandemic. All these aspects are focused on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives both during the pandemic and beyond.

## **Funding Call**

In response to an exploration of the evidence base and the reports commissioned, the RCN Foundation is launching a call to fund further research into:

### ***Exploring nurses' and midwives' experiences of effective leadership strategies whilst practicing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic***

The call is for a mixed methods exploratory study that will examine the impact of effective leadership strategies on nurses' and midwives' experiences of practicing during the pandemic across the four UK nations.

The research will identify examples of effective leadership and will address the following questions:

- What does "effective leadership" look like?
- Where in the UK are effective leadership strategies being implemented?
- In which settings?
- What are the outcomes and impact of the strategies?
- How can effective leadership strategies be scaled up and sustained across all settings?

The aims of the research are to:

- identify any convergence, divergence and silence in nurses and midwives' experiences of effective leadership strategies across the four nations during the COVID-19 pandemic; and



- make recommendations for how these practices can be incorporated into future leadership strategies within nursing and midwifery beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recommendations made should be supported by a comprehensive dissemination plan. The research must cover initiatives in all four countries of the UK and include consultation with nurses, nursing associates, midwives, student nurses and midwives and healthcare support workers.

Funding available is up to the value of £30,000. The research should be undertaken in 2020/2021. The funding available could cover direct research-related salaries, research expenses within reason and dissemination costs. The funding will not cover indirect costs such as organisational overheads, capital costs or purchase of non-specialist equipment.

The RCN Foundation is seeking applications from individuals or organisations to deliver the research project over a nine-month period.

As this research relates to COVID-19, research teams will need to be able to take the research forward immediately.

Applicants will attend regular meetings with Trustees and/or Foundation staff virtually. The successful individual/organisation will be required to submit an interim report mid-way through the project and another report which presents the key findings and recommendations at the end of the project.

## **Application**

To apply for this funding call, please submit a research proposal to: [grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk](mailto:grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk)

The proposal should address the following headings:

### **Section A: Application details**

Please include the details of the research lead and the organisation that you are applying from. Please give a description of the organisation and list the team. In addition, please list any partner organisations involved in the research.

The ideal application will demonstrate:

- Considerable experience of carrying out evidence-based research around issues in nursing
- Experience of producing influential reports at a policy or programme design level
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills



- Experience of providing written reports and presenting findings to both nursing professionals and non-specialists

## **Section B: Project Details**

This section will introduce the questions and issues central to the research and should identify the aims and objectives and what methods or means you plan to use. Please also include here any ethical approvals that may be required.

Please describe the main outputs and outcomes of the research and how these meet the RCN Foundation's priorities.

Please describe how the research will be evaluated.

We are seeking projects that will be undertaken during a maximum of nine months.

Please provide an outline of the timescales of the project. This should include the key phases, deadlines and milestones of the project, as well as any other relevant information.

Please outline how you propose to disseminate the outcomes of the project, identifying the key activities, and the audiences at whom the outcomes will be targeted.

## **Section C: Project Costs and Resources**

The maximum budget for this call is £30,000. Please provide a detailed breakdown of costs using the format within the application form.

## **Next Steps**

The closing date for applications is 5pm on 30 November 2020.

Interviews will be held during January 2021 and applicants will be informed of the decision in early February 2021.

Proposals received after the closing date will not be considered.

Completed proposals should be submitted by email to: [grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk](mailto:grants@rcnfoundation.org.uk)

Should you have any questions about this funding call please contact Dr Sarah McGloin Head of Grants and Impact at the RCN Foundation on email: [sarah.mcglain@rcn.org.uk](mailto:sarah.mcglain@rcn.org.uk)

Thank you for your interest.