

# In Answer to a Student's Protest

**Anthony J. Carr**  
Member of Council, Rcn

Anthony Carr is a Council member of the Rcn and, as a young man himself, he writes to another young man whose protest we so recently published

DEAR MR. DESMOND,  
May I thank you for your most stimulating article in the *Nursing Times* on December 4 entitled 'A Student's Protest'.

As a young man myself I could read in your words the hopes, frustrations and anxieties that a young person feels as she or he develops and finds a place in the great profession of nursing.

Does it surprise you a little, Mr. Desmond, that there are younger people than many student nurses think on the Council of the Rcn? I think you will be inclined to agree that being a young man with a young and growing family, and active in nursing, I fulfil some of your requirements to answer your queries.

May I say how I agree with your comments about student nurse status—that when you should be supernumerary to the staff, learning and studying, you find yourself as an indispensable pair of hands in the ward. I will not dwell on this subject, but my own views are clearly laid out if you wish to read them (*Nursing Mirror*, June 12, 1964).

Your question regarding student nurses not being able to join the Rcn as members is rather interesting. While I personally feel that the only way the Rcn can be truly representative of the nursing profession is to have student, pupil and enrolled nurses in its membership (if they are not to be lost for ever to the trades unions), it is a different matter to convince the existing associations of the importance of this at the present time. I think that both you and I will have to work and prepare for this day even if it belongs to the future.

Do not despair; a few years ago a man would not have been writing this letter. There has been great progress and will be in the future.

I am a little worried about your ideas of negotiating salaries for student nurses apart from the whole nursing structure. Let me try and explain. Say you are successful in obtaining a rise of £200 a year. You then qualify. Your increase in salary on becoming a staff nurse will then be so small that you will comment, like staff nurses today, that it is not worth qualifying. And you would be right in saying this.

If the problem of pairs of hands is to be solved, and I believe through the Platt

Report there is a real chance, then you will be treated like a student and receive an educational grant. Is it not better to work for this now rather than change back at a later date? Also, do not lose sight of your goal in life. You are training to become a qualified nurse. Training is but a small part of the whole professional life of a nurse. When you are a trained nurse you will expect a much greater reward for your services than at present. But will you receive it? Do you know that there is (among many others) a grade of highly qualified nurse who is receiving at this time only just over three times the amount of salary you are receiving now? That is your tutor, who is trying to help you train as a nurse.

The salary structure for trained nurses is so condensed in a range of £1,500, lowest £500, highest £2,000, that in between these scales, hundreds of grades struggle to maintain their own salary scales to give incentive. I would suggest, Mr. Desmond, that a lengthening of the range to £3,000 or so would help solve many problems and give a breathing space for all grades, including student nurses.

Tell me, are you really serious about the Rcn leaving salaries, hours of work and conditions of service to other people who, to quote you, are 'those people who are in direct contact with them and in a better position to appreciate them'? Please remember that not all these 'other people' have been student nurses. They have not experienced the acute pressures of the day-to-day work in the wards or of night duty in an acute ward, with its great responsibilities. Yet you seem to say that these people are the ones in direct contact with nursing.

As a member for the Rcn of the Staff Side of the Nurses and Midwives Whitley Council, and in professional life an assistant matron, I come daily into contact with all grades of nurses, listen to their hopes and frustrations and help to solve some of their problems. I may be very presumptuous, but I think I am as much qualified to help negotiate salaries as any other person who tries to do so.

Remember also that the people you mention who are in 'direct contact' also negotiate for non-nursing grades. It is only fair for you to ask why a nursing orderly can sometimes take home almost as much salary as you, even when you are

qualified. Is it that the nurse is viewed with the porter, orderly and domestic? This may be so—I do not know—but it is worth thinking about.

When you ask 'Does the Rcn consider the opinions of the people of the profession', do you really mean that the 45,000 members of the Rcn who elect their Council by democratic vote choose colleagues who are out of touch with day-to-day problems of student and other nurses? A look at the qualifications and posts of these people should dispel any doubt about this.

Remember that all the Council of the Rcn are registered nurses. Take a look at the other organizations and see how many nurses are on their executive councils. I do sincerely believe, Mr. Desmond, that nurses must really be represented by nurses if we are going to establish a profession worthy of its name and not have unqualified persons telling the profession what to do. Each profession must re-establish itself in every generation and not live on past tradition.

Well, I must end. It has been a joy to write to you. I have spoken personally to you, but I am sure some of my colleagues will join me in saying that if you are not a member of the Student Nurses' Association you should become one, and then when you qualify as a nurse join the Rcn. You will be a tower of strength to your local Branch. The Rcn needs nurses with a point of view because, as you know, there seem to be so many nurses without a point of view on anything.

One last thought. As local Rcn Branch secretary at Birmingham I was looking through the minute book for the year 1927 the other evening. This, by the way, was before I was born. You will be amazed when I tell you that the topics discussed at that time were so very similar to those talked about in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

ANTHONY J. CARR

TWO MALE NURSES were invested as Serving Brothers of the Order of St. John, at the Grand Priory Church, Clerkenwell, on December 8. They are Mr. Edwin R. Ball, of Haverhill, Suffolk, and Mr. Trevor Jeffry of Littlehampton. Invested as Serving Sisters were Miss Annie L. Gadd, Birmingham, Mrs. J. McDonald Stevens, Preston, and Miss Ellen Zillah Amor, Kingston, Surrey.