

UNISON demand fair pay for vaccinators

The Head of Health at UNISON Scotland, Willie Duffy, has written to the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman, on Wednesday highlighting with her again the inequality of pay which nursing staff who are delivering vaccines are receiving. We were told the matter was first raised at a Teams meeting with Ms Freeman last Friday.

Mr Duffy has expressed the union's position in a letter sent to the Health Secretary which The Edinburgh Reporter has seen. But we have also heard from a member of nursing staff delivering the vaccines – firstly about the rate of pay which they think is unfair – and also about possible shortcomings in the actual delivery of the vaccine by independent contractors.

Fair pay

In the letter to the Health Secretary Mr Duffy writes: “The second area was around the model for staff in the vaccination programme which is not a sustainable nor a fair system for the service delivery of this programme.

“There is a significant inequality of payments with £231.00

for 3.5 hours work to independent contractors and the haste in NHS Boards using these contractors instead of directly employed or bank staff. We would therefore request that the programme for vaccination is revisited as a matter of urgency.

“Many retired staff have also returned to practice to undertake vaccinator roles. Most of these people have undertaken the significant training package in their own time. Initially staff were getting shifts, however, in some Health Boards with the introduction of independent contractors at a very highly inflated cost both these staff and directly employed and bank staff are now not getting shifts.

“Not only is this at a huge cost it is also causing major issues with our members and we would request that you instruct Health Boards only to use independent contractors as a last resort rather than offering them work ahead of their own and bank staff.”

Comment from a member of the nursing profession

Mass vaccination centres are staffed by General Practice Nurses (GPN) and also by independent contractors such as optometrists. The Edinburgh Reporter was contacted by a GPN who expressed how incredibly sad this situation had made them.

The nurse, who wishes to remain anonymous, said: “Nurses naturally want to help, and offer all we can. Its in our blood. Due to this we often get taken advantage of professionally, and financially. In regards to Covid vaccination, we have been shafted.

“We were asked to apply to the Nurse Bank to do extra shifts outwith our own jobs, to administer flu vaccines. A nurse starts her professional career on a Band 5 on the NHS Scotland

pay scale. Many GPNs are Band 6. We were informed we would be paid for flu clinics at the rate we are on in our daily jobs, after some fighting. We were happy with this.

“We started the work, only to have it flaunted in our faces that Pharmacists, Dentists, Optometrists would be paid approx £235 per 3.5 hour sessions. They were offered these shifts weeks ahead of nurses, so we had very few shifts left that we could book.

Bearing in mind we had to jump through hoops to do extra training which could amount to about 50hrs. Not paid for.

“We vaccinate in our every day jobs. We are one of the main vaccinator groups in nursing, and are very experienced and proficient. The differing information we were given about training led to a massive amount of stress and a large drop out of GPNs once more, from the programme.

“That comes on top of other professionals being paid hugely sickening amounts to do the same job. These other professionals barely had to do any training, they have no experience at vaccinating.

“A GP will rarely give an injection.

“An optometrist never vaccinates, and a pharmacist until recently, would never administer.

“A vaccination is mostly an injection, but not all injections are vaccinations.”

Norman Provan, Associate Director, Royal College of Nursing Scotland said: “Nursing staff are experienced in delivering vaccination programmes and are central to the current mass vaccination roll out. We are aware of some concerns around the levels of pay and access to shifts. We have raised these and the need for a long term sustainable approach to the vaccination workforce with Scottish Government. I would ask any affected members to contact us so we can provide support.”

We asked The Scottish Government for comment. A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “Many health and social care staff can deliver vaccines, and it is vital that we encourage as many staff as possible to join the vaccination effort. This ensures that we have a highly skilled, capable, able and resilient workforce in place to vaccinate the people of Scotland.

“All staff employed to work on the programme are paid in accordance with nationally set terms and conditions and are working to agreed job roles, which come with specified rates of pay.”