

Mr Edward Argar MP
Minister for Health
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

23 March 2022

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you regarding pay rates for agency workers in the NHS and urgently seeking information and clarification on the delayed publication of the updated price cards. We have engaged with various members of the team at NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) since the pay increase for NHS staff was announced last year but have been told there are delays at government level around the updated price cards. Now that the Spring Statement has taken place and we are only a few weeks away from the new financial year, the REC and agencies – who have been critical workforce partners of the NHS – are again urgently seeking clarity on the price cards, as well as how the National Insurance (NI) increase will be processed.

As a reminder of the context to this request, the pay increase for NHS staff was announced in July last year, backdated to April; however, agencies have not been provided with updated price cards. The latest information from the NHSE/I is still showing rates for 2020-2021. This means that the pay increase has not been reflected in agency workers' wages.

The REC has reached out to the temporary staffing team at NHSE/I multiple times and we have been advised that a review was underway and that agencies will be informed shortly. We appreciate that there are protocols and procedures that organisations have to follow but we are not clear what factor caused such a significant delay. We were recently told that the delay was to incorporate the increases in National Minimum Wage and National Insurance (NI) but those changes have been previewed for many months now.

The contribution of agencies and agency workers to the NHS was recognised and thanked by the government during the pandemic, so we are keen to see this issue addressed quickly so that the disparity in pay between substantive staff and agency workers can be rectified. Agency workers, who show equal dedication and commitment to their patients as substantive staff, should not be left behind. We are also concerned that this disparity is not in line with the Agency Workers Regulations 2010 - designed to protect qualifying agency workers and ensure that they receive the same basic working and employment conditions as substantive staff in all sectors.

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We are also keen to find out how the department plans to deal with the upcoming NI increase and reflect the change in the price caps and frameworks, as this will have an immediate and significant impact on our sector. With April fast approaching, we would be grateful for further information.

The updating of rate cards points to a much broader issue - NHS workforce procurement and frameworks are in need of review. The unprecedented level of staff shortages has challenged the entire healthcare system, and we see the impact of this first hand in the recruitment sector. We would be keen to share our insights on this matter with you and your team. Staff competition is now so fierce that private wards and hospitals are telling us they have closed their doors and cannot support the delivery of both their private and NHS contracts. As taxpayers, the REC and our members believe that there should be regulation and proper controls when public money is involved. But the workforce issues we now see point towards why we need a review as the current price caps have skewed the system.

The REC has a large volume of data and market intelligence that we are keen to share with the Department to address the above issues. Enclosed is a briefing pack that summarises some initial data. I look forward to receiving your response on this matter, and I would be very happy to discuss these issues in more detail with you or your senior team. Natalie (Natalie.wright@rec.uk.com) in my office would be happy to arrange a meeting at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Shoesmith
Deputy Chief Executive