

Health Secretary says nurses' pay demands 'neither reasonable nor affordable'

Pay demands from unions representing nurses are "neither reasonable nor affordable" amid the threat of strike action, the [Health Secretary](#) has said.

Steve Barclay is "saddened" by the proposed industrial action by the [Royal College of Nursing](#) (RCN), which he said is in "nobody's best interests".

He is resistant to negotiating on pay, with the union demanding an increase of at least 15% compared with the £1,400 rise awarded earlier this year.

Mr Barclay said the pay award "is a balanced increase", which is "fair for nurses and the taxpayer".

He wrote in the Sunday Telegraph: "Yet the RCN is demanding a massive pay rise of 17.6%; an increase that is simply neither reasonable nor affordable.

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"It is about three times the average settlement that millions

of hard-working people, including many Sunday Telegraph readers, working outside the public sector will typically receive.

“Huge settlements like these would turbocharge inflation when we are endeavouring to keep it under control.

“It will have an adverse impact on people’s incomes in the long run.”

Mr Barclay wrote his door “will always be open” to the unions, following a “constructive” meeting with RCN general secretary Pat Cullen in [Whitehall](#) on Thursday.

The talks instead were said to have focused on a “wide range of issues” including patient safety and working conditions.

He went on: “If the RCN does go ahead with industrial action, I will make sure that emergency services continue to operate for those that need them most, and patients should continue to come forward for emergency services as normal.

“But it is inevitable that any strike would mean some patients will have their treatment delayed, and I would urge the unions to consider the impact on those who rely on the [NHS](#) for their care.

“We are facing a difficult winter for our whole country and industrial action is in nobody’s best interests.”

The RCN announced on Wednesday that its members in the majority of NHS employers across the UK have backed industrial action.

The health service will turn its attention to treating emergency patients in a “life-preserving care model”, with sources saying some hospitals on strike days will have staffing levels similar to those over Christmas.

Some of the most serious cancer cases could still be treated, while urgent diagnostic procedures and assessments will be staffed if they are needed to gather data on potentially life-threatening conditions or those that could lead to permanent disability.

Industrial action is expected to be held before the end of the year at some of the UK's biggest hospitals, including Guy's and St Thomas' opposite Parliament, the Royal Infirmary in [Edinburgh](#), University Hospital Wales, and Belfast's Royal Victoria.

Other health worker unions including Unison and the GMB will announce the result of strike ballots before the end of the month among staff including ambulance drivers and paramedics, hospital porters and cleaners.