Speech by Natasha Green
A Student Nurse Representing
the Royal College of Nurses
during the 2025 International Nursing Week

Thank you for the opportunity to share my reflections as a student nurse in the UK. In this presentation, I'll be speaking about the meaning behind my nursing practice, my academic journey, my reflective process, the challenges we face in healthcare, and my perspective on the future of nursing.

1. The Meaning and Purpose of My Nursing Practice
For me, nursing is more than a profession, it's a platform for advocacy, inclusion, and social change. My nursing practice is rooted in the belief that everyone, patients and healthcare professionals alike, deserves to be heard, respected, and cared for with dignity. As a disabled student nurse, I am deeply passionate about representing disabled voices, both within the profession and among the patients we serve.

This passion has shaped my work outside of clinical settings as well. I currently serve as the Chair of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Student Committee and previously held the role of RCN Eastern Board Member. These positions have given me the opportunity to influence policy, amplify student and disabled voices, and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable future in nursing.

What motivates me is the drive to fight for systemic change, to break down barriers and ensure that nursing is a profession where everyone can thrive. I am inspired every day by the strength of those I represent and the knowledge that together, we are building a better future for us all.

2. Academic Experience: Strengths and Gaps in Education and Placements
While my academic journey has equipped me with strong theoretical foundations and communication skills, it's clear that there are critical gaps within the current education system, particularly when it comes to placements and real-world preparation.

One of the most pressing issues is the inconsistency in placement quality. While some placements are incredibly supportive, others lack structure, clear learning objectives, or available mentors. This results in unequal experiences that directly impact student development. Furthermore, the increasing demands on clinical staff often mean there is limited time to engage with students, leaving us to rely heavily on independent learning in environments that aren't always conducive to that.

Another major gap is the disconnect between what we're taught in the classroom and what we encounter in clinical practice. This inconsistency can leave students feeling underprepared and unsure of how to apply theoretical knowledge effectively.

To bridge these gaps, I believe universities and healthcare trusts must collaborate more closely to ensure a standardised, high-quality placement experience. Mentors should be supported with training and protected time for student development, and students should be involved in structured reflection, simulation-based learning, and interdisciplinary teamwork to reinforce clinical readiness.

3. My Reflective Process and Support System

Reflection is a fundamental part of my nursing journey, both professionally and personally. I use a reflection journal to document and process each day, whether I'm on placement or not. This daily practice helps me identify what I've learned, what I could do differently, and how to improve moving forward. It's not just a learning tool; it's also essential for my mental wellbeing.

Writing about my experiences, especially the challenging ones, helps me process emotions and avoid internalising stress. It provides clarity, emotional release, and a sense of closure at the end of the day. This habit of reflective writing supports my growth as a nurse and strengthens my resilience.

At this stage, I recognise the importance of continued mentorship, clinical exposure, and honest feedback to help build my confidence and refine my practice. My mentor, a senior nurse, has been instrumental in guiding me through complex situations. Alongside my mentor, my support system includes fellow students, university lecturers, and my RCN network, who continue to provide encouragement and advice throughout this journey.

4. Challenges in Healthcare and the Role of Students

One of the most urgent challenges we're facing in healthcare right now is the lack of newly qualified nurse (NQN) jobs, a consequence of continued NHS budget cuts. Many students are finishing their training only to find a shortage of permanent roles, a reality that undermines both morale and workforce sustainability.

Students are also navigating rising living costs, long unpaid placements, and mounting academic pressure. These challenges are further compounded by cuts to nursing education, including course closures, reduced funding for nursing educators, and a significant drop in applicants to degree programs. This combination is deeply concerning and has long-term consequences for the future of our profession.

As a student nurse, I use my role within the RCN to help bridge these gaps. I actively participate in national working groups, engage in campaigns that highlight student and workforce issues, and represent student voices at the highest level. Right now, I'm attending the 2025 RCN Congress as a voting member and have the privilege of being the proposer of two key resolutions focused on driving meaningful change for students and the profession at large.

These platforms give me the opportunity to raise concerns, influence policy, and work

collaboratively with others to push for action. Whether it's campaigning for improved placement support, sustainable workforce planning, or fairer access to education, I see advocacy as a core part of my nursing role, even as a student.

5. The Future of Nursing and Global Leadership

The future of nursing depends on our ability to lead not just at the bedside, but also across policy, education, and international collaboration. From my perspective, global nursing leadership is built on three pillars: advocacy, multidisciplinary teamwork, and system thinking.

Nurses are often the first to recognise inequalities and systemic issues within healthcare. By advocating for patients, colleagues, and communities, we bring those realities to decision-makers. That same advocacy must also extend beyond national borders, championing global health equity, climate-conscious care, and inclusion across cultural contexts.

Multidisciplinary working is also key. Nurses must not only collaborate within clinical teams but also engage meaningfully with public health experts, policymakers, educators, and technology leaders. When nurses are central to those conversations, we ensure that patient-centered care remains at the heart of healthcare innovation and reform.

To truly model global leadership, we must also continue developing skills in diplomacy, communication, cultural competence, and strategic thinking. As a student, I'm already seeing how platforms like the RCN, international forums, and even collaborative student initiatives can help amplify our voices and shape nursing as a globally unified and resilient profession.

Conclusion

Nursing is a powerful force for change. It is a space where advocacy meets compassion, where care meets courage. As a student nurse, I am proud to be part of a generation that is not only learning how to care, but also how to lead. Through reflection, advocacy, and collaboration, locally and globally, we are helping to shape the future of our profession: one that is stronger, fairer, and truly inclusive.

Thank you.