

# Sturgeon putting independence before public services

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Nicola Sturgeon has been told to take responsibility for the nurse staffing crisis which has led to cancelled operations and empty theatres – instead of agitating for another referendum.

As health secretary, she cut student nursing numbers in two successive years, a decision she today said she stood by.

However, this week it has emerged hospitals have had to cancel procedures because of a lack of workers, and desperate health boards are forking out up to £1500 for agency nurse shifts.

And even after announcing a modest increase in student numbers for next year, the Royal College of Nursing said yesterday this still wouldn't meet demand, adding: "It is not enough to say that there are more nurses or that today's intake figures are the highest in years."

At First Minister's Questions, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said Ms Sturgeon should "confront the failings of 10 years" rather than obsessing about independence.

Ruth asked, were the First Minister to have her time again, would she still have cut those nursing numbers in 2010 and 2011.

Instead of admitting that error, she said: "We took decisions on the data available at the time."

This is despite both nursing bodies and opposition parties warning the cuts would come back to haunt the NHS.

Ruth also raised the example of north east patient Hugh Falconer, who was put on an urgent referral for treatment and told he would receive surgery within 12 weeks.

However, he's since been informed that the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary can't perform the surgery, and patients are no longer being referred to the waiting times back-up facility in Glasgow.

**Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:** "We have a Scottish Government which puts its failing independence obsession before an NHS crisis

of its own making.

“The First Minister asks what sort of country we want to be: I want a country run by a government that does the job we pay it to do – to look after Scotland’s public services.

“Instead, we have one obsessed with a narrow nationalist project that has had its day.

“Six years ago, as health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon embarked on catastrophic cuts to student nursing places.

“She was warned by nursing leaders and opposition parties of the short-sightedness of this approach, and the impact it would have on patient care.

“Now, as predicted, patients are paying the price as routine operations are cancelled and treatment waiting times grow – all because of staff shortages.

“People want a country run by a Scottish Government that spends its every waking hour sorting out public services like the NHS – not obsessing about another referendum, or stoking up Brexit divisions.

“It’s time for her to confront the failings of the last decade of this SNP government, and set out clear plans on how she intends to tackle them.”

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**RCN Scotland said the SNP was “failing to futureproof” Scotland’s nursing workforce:**

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/student-nurse-intake-numbers-25-jan-2017>

**Student nursing numbers have fallen under the SNP:**

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2014/12/student-nursing-numbers-hit-new-low/>

**Earlier this week, the Scottish Conservatives revealed desperate health boards are paying up to £1500 per shift to agencies to cover staff shortages:**

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/01/agency-nurses-paid-more-than-1500-a-shift/>

**It has been reported that operations are being cancelled as a result of staff shortages:**

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/operations-cancelled-over-staff-shortage-2qtbvv8lw>