

Press release

Monday 18 September 2017

National Guardian for the NHS calls for more time to be invested in Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

More time should be invested in the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role, to support NHS staff to speak up and raise concerns.

Dr Henrietta Hughes, the National Guardian for the NHS, is [publishing a set of recommendations](#) for trust leaders based on the findings of the first ever Freedom to Speak Up Guardian survey.

Dr Hughes said:

“Speaking up protects patients and improves the lives of NHS staff. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians provide an additional route for staff to raise issues, and support staff to do this every day. However, they need sufficient time to enable them properly to meet the needs of the workers they support. NHS leaders should provide that time as an investment in their staff.

“Our survey shows that great strides are being made in speaking up but the picture is not consistent and there is still more to be done. The recommendations I am making will help improve the consistency and quality of support for speaking up in all trusts.”

The recommendations for the role include:

- ring-fenced time to enable guardians properly to meet the needs of workers
- all workers, particularly the most vulnerable, should have effective routes to enable them to speak up
- Boards need to hear regularly from their guardian, in person

The survey reveals some positive trends, including:

- nearly 9 out of 10 guardians are communicating their role internally
- over 8 out of 10 guardians feel supported by their senior management teams and Chief Executives, with only 3 in 100 feeling that they don't get this support
- 7 out of 10 guardians say that their organisations are actively tackling barriers to speaking up.

Sir Robert Francis QC recommended the guardian role in his 'Freedom to Speak Up' report published in [2015](#). The standard NHS contract requires all NHS trusts and foundation trusts to nominate a guardian.

Ruth May, Executive Director of Nursing for NHS Improvement, said:

“All staff should be properly supported to raise concerns and the information they share can be a valuable source of intelligence to drive improvement in the NHS. It's great to see that the vital role of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in trusts is making a real impact in supporting staff to raise concerns, but there is more work to do. Therefore, we support the recommendations from this survey and will continue to

work closely with the National Guardian to further improve the experience of speaking up in the NHS.”

Daniel Mortimer, Chief Executive for NHS Employers, said:

“We welcome the recommendations outlined in the survey and would encourage employers to take steps to reflect on their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian arrangements. Issues arising from staff raising concerns can often be complex and requires skilful handling so it will be important to ensure the individual in that role has access to dedicated time, resources, support and training.

“It will also be important for guardians to work closely with other relevant parts of the organisation to ensure issues and trends can be recognised and understood in order to drive improvements and the role remains meaningful and effective at a local level.”

Saffron Cordery, Director of Policy and Strategy for NHS Providers, said:

“We welcome this report which shows the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is being taken seriously in the NHS. The findings reinforce key recommendations by Sir Robert Francis, that where there is support from senior managers and sufficient time dedicated to their role, the guardians can make a positive impact.

“We would encourage trust leaders to examine the report’s conclusions carefully to ensure that helpful cultural and practical conditions are in place, so that their staff can benefit fully from the assistance provided by this new and important role.”

Ends

Notes to editors

- 1) The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Survey report can be found here http://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20170915_freedom_to_speak_up_guardian_survey2017.pdf
- 2) The survey was open between 12 June and 30 June 2017.
- 3) After chairing the Mid-Staffordshire Inquiry, Sir Robert Francis QC recommended the establishment of an Independent National Officer resourced jointly by regulators and oversight bodies to review the handling of concerns raised by workers in NHS trusts and the treatment of the person or people who spoke up.
- 4) The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role was introduced in October 2016 to support workers to speak up when they see anything that may compromise patient safety or the quality of care, and to tackle cultural and other barriers that workers may experience when they wish to speak up.
- 5) All trusts and foundation trusts have appointed a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and there are now over 500 individuals in this role, or in a supporting ‘ambassador’ or ‘champion’ role.
- 6) Dr Henrietta Hughes is the National Guardian for the NHS and took up post in October 2016. She is a former Medical Director at NHS England and practices as a GP one day a week.
- 7) The National Guardian’s Office provides support, guidance and training for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in trusts and foundation trusts and is responsible for providing challenge and support to the health and care system about freedom to speak up matters.