

Press release

Thursday 1 November 2018

Survey reveals NHS leaders must do more to support speaking up

A report published today (1 November 2018) by the National Guardian for the NHS in England, Dr Henrietta Hughes, calls upon NHS leaders to take greater responsibility for supporting workers to speak up.

Every trust in England has a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. They are there for NHS workers to speak up to and last year handled over 7,000 cases.

They are supported by the National Guardian's Office – an independent, non-statutory body with the remit to lead culture change in the NHS so that speaking up becomes business as usual. Its annual survey asked guardians, and those supporting them, for their views on how the role is being implemented, and more generally about the culture of speaking up.

The survey shows that the highest performing organisations – as indicated by their CQC rating – are fostering open and transparent cultures, where workers can speak up without fear of retribution.

This year, the survey includes responses from guardians appointed by arm's-length bodies, including health regulators. "It's notable that the perceptions of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in these organisations is on a par with perceptions in provider organisations rated as inadequate or requiring improvement," said Dr Hughes.

"I make this observation to start the conversation with these organisations about learning and improving. It suggests to me that they can learn from the trusts where Freedom to Speak Up is working well.

"NHS leaders must do more to support their guardians and all those who are working in the NHS. The tone for openness and transparency needs to be set from the top and our survey indicates that the culture in some of the arm's-length bodies, including regulators, may fall considerably short of many of the organisations that look to them for leadership, guidance and support."

One of the other key findings from the survey is a reflection from those that responded that things are getting better, with 83 per cent of them saying the speaking up culture in the NHS had improved over the last 12 months.

However, support for guardians is inconsistent, and many (42 per cent of guardians responding to the survey) are left without any ring-fenced time to do their job.

"NHS workers deserve better," said Dr Hughes. "Guardians have been appointed to support workers to speak up to keep patients safe and improve staff experience, but far too many are left without any time to do their difficult and important job."

>ENDS<

PHOTO: Dr Henrietta Hughes, National Guardian for the NHS.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- All trusts in England have a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian in place, with other individuals working in a supporting role.
- Last year over 7,000 speaking up cases were raised with guardians. Around a third of cases included an element of patient safety and 45% included an element of bullying and harassment. The full suite of [speaking up data](#) is available on our webpages.
- Freedom to Speak Up feeds into the Care Quality Commission well-led inspection framework, with guardians contributing directly to inspections.
- Fieldwork for the 'Freedom to Speak Up Guardians Survey 2018' took place in June. Results are based on 361 responses (a 50 per cent response rate) from Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and those in a supporting role from NHS trusts, independent providers of healthcare, regulators and arm's-length bodies.
- In total, 42 per cent of guardians responding to the survey indicated that they had no ring-fenced time to carry out their duties. Guardians with less ring-fenced time are less likely to carry out many of the basic functions of the role.
- The survey indicates an apparent correlation between CQC ratings and perceptions of speaking up culture, including responses to the following statements:
 - "Speaking Up is taken seriously in my organisation" – 90 per cent of responses were positive in outstanding organisations, compared to 53 per cent in organisations rated inadequate
 - "Managers support staff to speak up" – 69 per cent of responses were positive in outstanding organisations, compared to 11 per cent in organisations rated inadequate
 - "Senior leaders support staff to speak up" – 84 per cent of responses were positive in outstanding organisations, compared to 47 per cent in organisations rated inadequate.
- Arm's-length bodies including regulators score less positively than organisations rated as 'good' in all of the eight questions measuring Freedom to Speak Up Guardians' perception about the speaking up culture. In three cases they score less positively than organisations rated as 'inadequate'
- For the first time, the survey asks about perceptions of Freedom to Speak Up culture in the NHS. In all, 83 per cent of respondents indicated that they thought that Freedom to Speak Up culture in the NHS had improved in the last 12 months.