

Press release

Thursday 20 December 2018

National Guardian's Office makes recommendations for improving speaking up processes at RCHT

In its fifth case review report published today (20 December), the National Guardian's Office has identified areas for improvement in speaking up processes, practices and culture at Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust.

Based on a review carried out at the trust in May and June this year, the report outlines evidence of the trust not always responding to instances of its workers speaking up in accordance with its policies and procedures, or with good practice. It found that as a result some workers felt that there was not a positive speaking up culture in the trust and that issues that they raised were either poorly handled, or ignored by management.

In relation to settlement agreements, the review identified several potential areas where they could be improved to remove obstacles to speaking up. The National Guardian's Office has therefore made a recommendation for itself to complete, with its partners, the review of settlement agreement guidance in the NHS and it will publish its findings and any recommendations in due course.

Dr Henrietta Hughes, National Guardian for the NHS, said, "We identified 13 recommendations for the trust to improve their support for their workers to speak up. But we have also made one recommendation for ourselves around the content of speaking up training provided by NHS trusts for their workers, and another in regard to settlement agreements.

"We have committed to working with partners involved in reviewing settlement agreement guidance in the NHS, namely the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Employers and NHS Improvement, to complete a review and take all appropriate steps to implement its findings.

"Our case reviews are focused on learning," said Dr Hughes. "Learning for the trust, learning for others – including ourselves – and learning for all other trusts around England. We encourage all trusts to use case review recommendations to carry out their own gap analysis to ensure they have considered the issues outlined in relation to the speaking up arrangements in their own organisations."

The case review also identified positive features. It was clear that the leadership of the trust understood well the need to improve the speaking up culture, and were beginning to take steps to do this. These included providing workers with a variety of means of raising issues through a network of speaking up champions across the trust, who supported the work of the trust Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

Dr Mairi Mclean, Chairwoman for Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust, said, “Supporting and encouraging colleagues to speak up when they have concerns is something we want to do well and is high on the agenda for our new leadership team. Over recent months we have seen more staff coming forward to raise concerns, using our new network of champions and other routes, and this is a positive sign we are starting to get things right. We all want RCHT to be a brilliant place to work and as we head into 2019 bringing about a fully open and supportive culture, in which the care and safety of patients and staff is always a number one priority, is absolutely our aim.”

Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and Deputy Chief Nurse at the Royal Cornwall Hospitals, Louise Dickinson added, “We welcome the report from the National Guardian’s Office which supports the actions we have been taking to encourage staff to feel confident to speak up. We will continue to work with them to improve our local processes and to bring examples of brilliant practice elsewhere into our hospitals.”

>ENDS<

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

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- 1) The National Guardian’s Office supports the National Guardian for the NHS, Dr Henrietta Hughes, in providing leadership, training and advice for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians based in all NHS trusts.
- 2) Dr Hughes’ role was a key recommendation from Sir Robert Francis’ [Freedom to Speak Up Review](#) in response to the Mid-Staffordshire scandal.
- 3) Freedom to Speak Up feeds into the Care Quality Commission well-led inspection framework, with guardians contributing directly to inspections.
- 4) The [case review process](#) was launched as a 12-month pilot in June 2017. The National Guardian’s Office undertakes speaking up reviews in NHS trusts where there is evidence that the handling of a speaking up case does not meet with good practice.
- 5) For further information please contact Russell Parkinson at Russell.Parkinson@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk