

National Guardian
Freedom to Speak Up

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100
VOICES



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Foreword

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are changing the conversation about what it means to speak up in health. With a network of over 1,100 guardians and champions in England, workers are being supported and positive actions are being taken as a result.

Speaking up and listening up should be a natural part of our conversations with colleagues, managers and each other. As a GP, I know that people across the UK want to speak up about anything that gets in the way of delivering great care. This needs to be business as usual to keep our patients safe and support our colleagues. The Freedom to Speak Up is to know that you will be welcomed, thanked, listened to and that your concerns and ideas will be acted on, leading to positive change.

In health, as in all sectors, the best leaders understand the importance of listening to workers who are the eyes and ears of an organisation. But in health it is even more crucial as speaking up can be a matter of life or death. A positive environment and a supportive culture are key elements of the [NHS People Plan](#). The Freedom To Speak Up Index, a new metric taken from the NHS Annual staff survey, shows that a positive speaking up culture may be correlated with higher performing organisations.

Following the public inquiry into the tragic events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, the Government asked me to lay my Annual Report before Parliament to highlight and share best practice in speaking up. My office works in partnership with a wide range of organisations and the devolved nations, learn best practice from each other.

My office surveys guardians and collects data on the numbers of workers who have spoken up to them and the types of issues they raise. Over 19,000 cases have been brought to guardians since we started collecting data.

But data only tells part of the story - to get a real understanding of what Freedom to Speak Up means, it is important to hear from workers themselves. That's why my office launched the 100 Voices campaign: to share the stories that describe the current reality of speaking up in health.

We have collected together a selection here, alongside the National Guardian Office's 2019 Annual Report. Some have been provided by Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, others by workers themselves. Within these pages you will hear a selection of voices. They describe their experiences of speaking up, the impact this has had and how it has led to positive change.

These illustrations are only a small percentage of the cases guardians have heard but give an indication of the wide variety of issues; from patient safety concerns to inefficient processes; from toxic cultures to training of workers; from waiting rooms, wards, laboratories, kitchens, offices, clinics and boardrooms.

Some examples relate to improving patient care, others about improving the lives of workers. The variety and scope of the things that workers speak up about illustrates the positive change that can occur when workers' voices are heard.

Speaking up can require courage, particularly in an unsupportive environment. Workers may not take the risk if they believe that nothing will be done about it.

That is why I am really grateful to everyone that has spoken up and for the hard work that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians do to support workers. As well as providing an additional channel through which workers can speak up, they hold managers and leaders to account so that concerns are acted upon. I am also grateful to the managers and leaders who act on the concerns, as listening up can also take courage and is a mark of effective leadership.

Encouraging a speak up culture within the health service is not any one person's responsibility. I believe it is a collective responsibility which we all share as a society. For MPs, these stories represent the voices of constituents and organisations providing care. I encourage them to use our published directory to find out who the guardians are in the organisations within their constituencies; to contact them and learn more about the local speaking up culture. Working in partnership with the devolved nations, we want to improve the experience of speaking up. My office will be glad to support.

We are continuing to collect 100 Voices and will be publishing more examples on our website in the coming year.

By listening to workers' voices, we will change the conversation about speaking up, and listening up, in health.



Dr Henrietta Hughes
OBE FRCGP
National Guardian
for the NHS

The power of 'team'

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust

Zoe Grant, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust, said, "I had been the trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian for just over six months when two staff approached me. I have never underestimated how much courage it takes for people to step forward and speak up, particularly if they are associated with the team that they work in."

Peter and Joanne – who have asked to be named as they want to promote speaking up and reduce the stigma – were experiencing significant levels of stress due to challenges in safely managing their patient caseloads. They reported that other members of the team felt the same, with some reduced to tears as a result of the stress.

"Together we agreed that action needed to be taken immediately because their professional responsibilities were being compromised," said Zoe.

She contacted their Service Manager, Rachel Birks, who agreed to meet that very afternoon. "This in itself had a great impact," she said. "Straight away Peter and Joanne felt that their concerns were being taken seriously and that they were no longer going to be dismissed, as well as feeling that they did not have to accept that this was 'just how it is around here'."

Rachel listened to the issues and supported by offering constructive advice and guidance. A plan was formulated to ensure the team were able to address



their issues quickly and efficiently without compromising service delivery.

"We are a very busy service and sometimes you do not always recognise when staff are struggling," said Rachel. "We continually strive to ensure that there are opportunities for staff to discuss issues and concerns and Peter and Joanne's case has helped us to improve this.

"Our team meetings feel much more inclusive now and we have made sure that all staff know that we have an open-door policy to discuss any issues they may have.

"Although there are regular opportunities for supervision and reflective support sessions, we have since reinforced to staff that they can use these to discuss their own well-being and to talk through any build-up of stress levels so that the appropriate support mechanisms or improvements can be put in place."

Jane



Jane Munton–Davies, the Associate Director of the Directorate, said, “It is fundamental for us to recognise and understand when staff are under pressure.

“Our caseload management system was under review at the time when Joanne and Peter highlighted their concern. The Freedom to Speak Up concern was subsequently escalated to the trust’s Executive Team, who helped to progress the review of the caseload management tool. We now have a new improved version which is being piloted.”

Zoe said, “This story emphasises the importance and value of managers being open, transparent and responsive to staff concerns and why we should never undervalue the power of ‘team’ by taking proactive steps to support and encourage staff.”

When Peter and Joanne provided Zoe with an update several weeks later, they reported that speaking up had made a big difference. “The discussion and advice had made them feel empowered and valued and their voice continues to be heard,” she said.

“The team they both work in continues to have challenges, but these are being managed as improvements are gradually being made. What they both value the most is being actively involved in the discussions and decision-making and being kept up-to-date with all team and service developments.”

What they both value the most is being actively involved in the discussions and decision-making and being kept up-to-date with all team and service developments.

Safeguarding and patient safety

The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Cherma St Clair, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Hillingdon Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, does regular walkabouts around departments. It was during one of these walkabouts that a newly appointed worker raised a concern face-to-face and in confidence about something that had occurred the day before which did not seem right.

A young woman attended out-patient services for tests, having been referred by her GP. She was accompanied by an adult and appeared very anxious and distressed. While she undressed for her test, staff noted healed wounds on the covered areas of her body which looked like cuts from a razor blade.

The worker was concerned for the patient's safety and unsure whether these were from a previous self-harm episode, or whether this could be a safeguarding issue.

Although the trust safeguarding lead was not on duty that day, following advice from the trust safeguarding administrator, Cherma contacted the local authority for social care and health services. She discovered that the patient was currently under the mental health team for young adults.

A discussion with a social worker highlighted that there were red flags indicating that the patient's condition was deteriorating. As it was nearing the Christmas holiday period, a rescue plan was put in place that included psychologist input and referral to



the community dietician to address the patient's eating disorder.

The worker was informed of the safeguarding process and where they could get help in future. Staff revealed that they did not know what to do in this situation, and they were encouraged to raise all issues that they felt uneasy with or anything that just did not feel right.

“By speaking up, the worker promoted the well-being of the patient by preventing admission to in-patient mental health services. The workers said that they felt relieved that they were able to tell someone and that something was done,” said Cherma.

“Induction of new staff is critical to performance,” she concluded. “Freedom to Speak Up is now part of trust induction for all new starters. This case also underlines how vital visibility is to the guardian role.”

Saving thousands of pounds

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust covers many sites across the North East of England, including eight hospitals. Each hospital has many administrative teams and departments. All had their own stockpile of stationery.

Throughout the trust, there were also many different types of printers, meaning there were different types of expensive printer ink which often could not be shared between departments. Some printers required toner worth £320 to be kept in each small department.

Annette Benoist, an administration support officer, felt that too much money was being wasted on stationery resources and contacted Neil Cockling, their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Administration and stationery purchasing decisions had been devolved to all the managers of separate teams in the trust, so she was unsure who to speak up to in order to have the issue looked at.

Neil raised the issue with the trust's Director of Finance, who immediately commissioned an external review of stationery resources. This found that there were indeed thousands of pounds tied up in stationery cupboards.

The trust has now moved to centralised provision of stationery with standardised printers across the organisation so that no departments need to keep stockpiles of expensive ink for outdated and inefficient printers.



“As a result of Annette speaking up, the trust expects to save £200,000 a year on printer ink alone, with approximately a further £200,000 per year being saved on all stationery costs as a result of the entire investigation into centralised stationery buying,” said Neil. “This case has highlighted to me - as Freedom to Speak Up Guardian - that nothing is too small to speak up about to make a difference.”

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Post-merger issues

University Hospitals of Derby & Burton NHS Foundation Trust

In the last few years, the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton have merged to create one trust. As is often the case with mergers, some workers felt anxious about changes.

Following the merger, the Executive Team attended initial roadshows at all five sites to introduce themselves. But due to the extremely high workload following the merger, and the additional challenge of being across multiple sites, workers felt that they didn't see enough of the senior leadership team or Executive Team. They became concerned that the two-way communication process they had been used to was no longer as accessible.

“Workers were feeling anxious that they were unable to speak to the senior leadership team about their concerns and to ask questions about what was planned,” said Alison Bell, the trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

“Having been used to the senior leadership being very visible and responsive, they were worried that they would be unable to access them if they needed to raise clinical issues quickly.”

Along with the Non-Executive Director (NED) for Speak Up, Alison met with workers at drop-in Speak Up Surgeries across all sites where issues were raised. Some workers also chose to email the guardian directly and asked to meet to talk through their concerns. All made a request to have more opportunities to meet and talk with their senior leadership teams from their departments and the Executive Teams.

The guardian agreed with the NED that both would raise the issues with the CEO and the Director of HR and Organisational Development. Following this, a plan was agreed to set up some listening events at all sites with Executive Team members attending along with the guardian.

The communications team organised informal events across all sites with free breakfast or cake for anyone attending. They publicised them to ensure all staff knew they were taking place. The guardian ensured all staff who had spoken up were advised of the events and were encouraged to attend, which the majority of them did.

“The feedback on the events from workers who had spoken up, and others who attended, was so overwhelmingly positive, both from senior leaders being more visible and from workers feeling part of one team within the new merged trust, that it was decided to make them monthly engagement and listening events,” said Alison.

The events continue to be informal and workers have reported that they have felt safe to speak up about some issues there that had been on their mind for a while. These were considered by the leaders and have already led to further discussions about improvements.



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One worker said, “I used the breakfast opportunity to speak up to [the Managing Director] about the issues in [my department]. He came down to meet the team the following week and matters have now been resolved.”

“A recent comment from a worker at a community campus was that other workers who attend the events have said they feel safe to speak up directly to the Board members when they attend. This is encouraging others to speak up within their teams,” said Alison.

“The most compelling outcome has been that the Board have seen the positive impact on workers by being on site and available in an informal setting,” she continued.

“Senior leaders now have a presence on all sites more often. This has allowed them the opportunity to respond quickly and face-to-face with workers speaking up. The CEO has spoken about how much he has learned about some of the challenges a range of workers are facing from attending the sessions. He sees them now as a valuable part of staff engagement.

“Feedback has been so positive that we now run these bi-monthly,” said Alison. “Whilst I spend a lot of time meeting workers who approach me with their issues, it is also helpful to meet workers at other more informal events as they will often speak up during those conversations as well.”

Bullying and harassment

Small NHS Foundation Trust

“I spoke to my line manager first, when I saw that no change was made, I escalated this to my line manager’s manager. No changes were made and I then reached out to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian through email as I was struggling to cope.”

I spoke to the guardian about the bullying and harassment I experienced from a colleague who targeted ethnic minorities. They would say things like “How come your English is good?” and make racist, sexist and religious jokes.

I spoke to my line manager. “This is just what they’re like, but I will speak to them”, they said. But nothing changed, in fact they received a promotion, despite their behaviour which had been raised by others who had since left the organisation.

I then spoke up to my line manager’s superior. They said, “Stop being an angry black woman”. They said that a training exercise with the team would be arranged. But this was not pursued any further.

I felt repeatedly dismissed, alienated and insulted and it affected my confidence because I was afraid to speak up.

I then reached out to the organisation’s Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. At first I was afraid because I did not want to be alienated even further. It was as if I met a doctor; she was able to assess the situation and diagnose the problem. I felt empowered because the guardian was extremely approachable and understanding, and she gave me encouragement which has allowed me to speak up now.

She spoke to my manager and my manager immediately spoke to the colleague on the telephone at home after work. When I came in to work the next morning, my manager told me that the colleague had cried and felt really bad as she was unaware of how her behaviour had affected me. But except for the initial apology, no other action has been taken.

The guardian, in a bid to escalate this further, invited me to share my experience to a wider audience. I spoke with a group of line managers to highlight the impact of my experience and educate them on raising and handling concerns in the workplace.

The guardian has shared my story at a board meeting, and there was a lot of discussion around race and managers’ behaviours. They agreed that all managers, including mine, will receive training in the handling of concerns which is being developed. The training will also cover sensitivity and inappropriate banter.

On reflection, I should have spoken up sooner rather than allow the issues to fester. I have learnt that speaking up about issues that I have experienced, seen or heard is worthwhile. I am now no longer afraid to speak up.

“An angry black woman”

Supporting a trainee

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



A trainee in a professional occupation was concerned about practices in one of her placement work areas.

She had seen different systems of work in other hospitals and in other parts of Cambridge University Hospitals which prompted her to raise suggestions for improvement in an education support meeting.

The response was that there was a lot of pressure in that work area and no capacity to consider different ways of working which left the trainee feeling disempowered.

She approached the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian because she felt it was important for her concerns to be properly listened to and addressed. Together they examined ways of speaking up, including what approach and language to use in seeking to raise the issues with the manager.

The trainee requested a meeting with the manager who asked for the concerns to be put in writing, but no meeting was arranged.

The guardian stayed in touch with her to provide advice and review progress. When the trainee rotated to a placement at another hospital, the guardian secured her agreement to continue to pursue her concerns.

These are now being taken forward by the Divisional Head of Workforce and part of the review is looking at the way in which managers listen and respond to concerns raised with them and what action needs to be taken to improve this.



A better working environment

London Ambulance Service NHS Trust

At London Ambulance Service NHS Trust (LAS), a paramedic spoke up to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, Katy Crichton, about a number of matters. The issues reported to Katy ranged from challenging behaviours to service-wide problems, such as a lack of training for new staff and inadequate capacity to deal with call volumes.

The paramedic told Katy, “I had sat in the office for several weeks worrying if I should speak to a colleague, a manager or a friend outside work. Occasionally, I would convince myself that I was exaggerating the state of affairs. Feeling isolated, I decided to contact the LAS guardian.

“My brief email prompted a very quick reply from the guardian. We met a few days later in a coffee shop away from work and I already felt I was going to be taken seriously.”



Katy escalated the matters and, with the involvement of the leadership team, including the Chief Executive, an action plan was established. After a couple of months, a review of the issues revealed that the actions had not gone far enough, and further measures were put in place, taking into account advice from the paramedic who spoke up.

The paramedic said, “I have seen significant changes in my place of work. It is a much more pleasant place to be. People are listened to and actions have been taken.”

As a result of the issues raised, the trust increased staffing levels in some areas, developed a new operational structure for the service, invested in additional training for staff, and monitored calls through a regular audit. Feedback from commissioners reported positive changes to the service and outcomes for patients.

Katy said, “We are very grateful that the paramedic felt able to come forward. By speaking up they have improved the working environment for themselves and for our patients.



“Listening to staff and learning from them is hugely important. It was particularly gratifying that the leadership team continued to listen, even after they had drawn up an action plan, and modified it based on further feedback. The ongoing experiences of the paramedic who spoke up really helped to address the problems in a comprehensive way.”

When reflecting on their experience of speaking up, the paramedic remarked, “One thing is for sure – an email to the guardian changed a lot, making the trust a better place to work and providing safer care for our patients.”

I have seen significant changes in my place of work. It is a much more pleasant place to be. People are listened to and actions have been taken.

Improving patient experience

Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS FT

A concern was emailed to Jude Graham, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber Trust, because workers were unclear about who may best help with a concern about two services rather than one.

The team had become concerned following the co-location of two quite different services - one for young people with sexual health issues and the other which was typically attended by older adults.

Clinic staff and administrators suggested they witnessed disgruntled patients and relatives making comments concerning the patient mix and the issues being discussed. Although no direct patient safety issues had occurred, they felt that the disharmony and the potential risk needed addressing.

Managers from each service were asked to attend a thinking session to address this concern, which all clinical and administrative workers also attended.

“The care group leads were very supportive that all workers, including reception area workers, were included in finding solutions for the issues as they often see a different perspective in terms of patient experience and room use. They see areas where groups interact, whereas clinicians often just see the patient or family alone,” said Jude.

The room use, co-location issues, clinic timings and team interaction were discussed openly and solutions reviewed.

The timings of appointments and room use systems were altered to enable the clinics to run at different times, therefore reducing the risk of problematic encounters in the waiting areas.

The team felt that their concerns were taken seriously, the new arrangements were put in place to reduce risk and enable continued service. “No appointments were lost and patient satisfaction increased in both clinics. The team managers were appreciative that all workers, including administrators, felt able to share their perspective,” said Jude. “The overall risk of patient conflict was reduced, and workers’ satisfaction increased, as a more agreeable solution was reached in terms of working arrangements, although the services continued to be co-located which was not to everyone’s satisfaction.”

Jude said workers felt their voice had “made a difference” and they were pleased they had spoken up. She added: “They told me that they joined the NHS to help patients. Even though some workers involved in raising the concern were not clinical members of staff, they feel that their contribution has helped the patients attending both clinics to feel more relaxed when attending appointments.

“The workers used the Freedom to Speak Up route, not because they had concerns about their relationships with the line managers of either service, but because they were confused about which service they should speak up to and the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian enabled them to resolve the issue.”

Managing close relationships

Solent NHS Trust

Workers contacted Pamela Permalloo-Bass, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Solent NHS Trust, and spoke up about preferential treatment of other workers who had closer working relationships with their line managers.

“At our Executive Freedom to Speak Up Oversight Committee, this issue has been raised as an overarching theme,” said Pamela. “This enabled further discussion on enabling a better understanding of professional boundaries in the workplace.”

The trust didn’t have a policy for ‘managing close relationships at work’, and as a result of these workers speaking up, a policy has now been drafted which will be implemented in due course.

The policy outlines workers’ responsibilities to ensure that any close personal relationships at work do not interfere with their duties and responsibilities. It also helps managers to deal promptly and sensitively with issues involving close personal relationships at work and to manage these matters in a consistent, fair and reasonable manner.

“In the short term, workers felt listened to, supported and guided,” said Pamela. “And in the medium term, we have achieved greater clarity with signposting, process and policies as a result of these workers speaking up.”

“In the longer term, team dynamics have improved and workers felt confident about speaking up in the knowledge that action would be taken. This has strengthened trust in the Freedom to Speak Up service.”



Listening and giving feedback

East London NHS Foundation Trust

Ade Dosunmu enjoys her role as Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at East London NHS Foundation Trust.

“Working in the role of Freedom to Speak Up Guardian combines my two passions for keeping patients safe and ensuring staff have a good experience at work,” she said. “I have received immense support from the senior leadership team and frontline staff have really welcomed the role; some of my colleagues call me ‘PALS for staff’.”

Ade is seeing more and more workers speaking up confidently about issues they might have otherwise left unattended or thought of as a small issue. Ade sees the guardian role as helping teams to have more open discussion about how speaking up can keep workers and patients safe and, in some cases, encouraging more feedback and information sharing.

She recalls an instance when she received several complaints about staff shortages over a short period of time. Staff shortages adversely affect patients where they lack adequate care; it puts extra pressure on staff to work with fewer resources and workers report feeling unable to provide care to the quality they want to.



“These concerns were brought to my attention by workers from different parts of the same service and I was able to see the pattern in the concern and link the issue back to the same service,” said Ade. “The issue was raised to the attention of the director for that service who took action immediately. It transpired that although managers in those services knew about the shortages and there was an ongoing recruitment plan, frontline staff were not aware that recruiting was happening at all, which led them to feeling that nothing was being done.”

An email was sent to all staff affected and a meeting was held to update workers of the ongoing recruitment taking place. Process to book additional staff was reinforced.



As a result of workers speaking up about their concern, the management team felt accountable to them to ensure the recruitment plan was actioned.

Speaking up about the matter didn't mean that workers were recruited overnight, but the staff who had spoken up felt reassured that their concern had been taken seriously by senior management. As a result of workers speaking up about their concern, the management team felt accountable to them to ensure the recruitment plan was actioned.

“Feedback to workers is really important,” said Ade. “It helps them to know what is happening and allows them to speak openly in the future should they ever be worried that something might be wrong.”

The role of Freedom to Speak Up has been supported by the trust Board. The trust Chief Executive, Dr Navina Evans CBE, said, “It is important for managers to create an environment which allows staff to speak up. I have learnt that there is fear and inability to talk about the right thing hence why it is important to build the culture of listening and learning”.

An open approach to apologies

North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust

A ward clerk contacted a Freedom to Speak Up Champion at North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust because they felt vulnerable and bullied and concerned for their job.

They had been chasing discharge forms for a patient who had transport booked for the following day. Because the discharge forms were not ready in time, a request to change the transport time was made. As a result, the care package for the patient was delayed by seven days.

The discharge team member mistakenly thought the ward clerk had delayed the care package. She was very angry and berated them on the phone, accusing the clerk of cancelling the care. When the clerk denied this, they were accused of lying.

The clerk told the champion that they felt undermined and were anxious that they would lose their job. The clerk's concerns were relayed to Suzanne Hamilton, the trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

The guardian spoke to the HR business partner. "Initially they said there was no obligation for the discharge team member to apologise; this was frustrating for the worker who had spoken up," said Suzanne. "But when the issue was fed back to the discharge planning lead, she came and apologised in person to the clerk and this went very well."

The clerk is now more confident in their job and was empowered to speak up again. "I am glad that we were able to facilitate such a positive outcome," said Suzanne. "It shows that a more open approach to apologising should be encouraged, and the HR department are working on a reconciliation policy rather than a grievance policy going forward."

Coaching for confidence

Gloucestershire Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust

Suzie Cro, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Gloucestershire Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust, was contacted by a colleague at work by email asking to come and speak to her.

“When my colleague came to see me, what they were describing was the start of a relationship breakdown with their line manager,” Suzie said.

“An incident had happened and things were said in anger. A previously comfortable relationship had turned sour. Resentment and ill-feeling seemed to grow on a daily basis and this had now been going on for months,” Suzie said. “The bad feeling was spreading as it felt like people had taken sides.”

Work was making the colleague feel very stressed; they wanted to leave and did not know how to get things back to the way they were. They hated coming to work and felt disengaged.

A resolution model was used to help the worker articulate what this situation would look like if it was resolved. The worker wanted to go back to having the relationship they needed from their line manager and was clear that they wanted to manage the situation themselves.

It was agreed that coaching sessions might be beneficial and these were arranged. In the trust, in speaking up situations, workers can get an urgent coaching appointment to help them resolve issues.

After two coaching sessions, the worker felt able to have the conversation they were dreading.

“After the conversation, the colleague came back to feed back to me,” said Suzie. “They felt empowered that they had fixed the situation themselves.”

“After the difficult honest conversation, the line manager and the worker were able to get back to talking again and were repairing their relationship.”



Making policies fairer for all

Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Olwyn Williams, a Personal Assistant working in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, emailed Tamera Howard, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (DHCFT), about the trust's 'retire and return' policy.

"I have been advised that it is not applicable to me because my post is deemed as 'not hard to recruit to,'" she wrote. "I have completed 41 years' unbroken full-time service in the NHS, including 23 years' working in CAMHS. I am requesting to return to my present role, with no reduction in hours."

Olwyn questioned how the refusal to retire and return could be considered fair and equitable, and in line with the trust's values. She was aware that in other trusts, 'retire and return' was permitted on all pay-bandings, so challenged how there could be such varying policies between different trusts. Olwyn loved her role and was keen to retire and return back to the team she knew and valued and was proud to work for.

She had contacted her manager initially, who had approved the request, but this was then not approved by senior management due to the trust's policy content and wording. She then contacted members of the trust's HR team. But while they were sympathetic and supportive, they also said that the policy must be adhered to.

After meeting with Olwyn, Tamera emailed senior HR managers within the trust, attaching a copy of the 'retire and return' policy for another local trust. Having spoken with a buddy Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at this trust, Tamera knew that staff there were able to retire and return with greater ease as the policy did not include the 'hard to recruit to' wording.

They recognised that a policy review was needed. This led to a discussion at the next Executive Leadership Team meeting, before being brought as an agenda item to the DHCFT staff forum, where representatives of teams across the trust discuss issues with the executive team.

At the staff forum, Tamera raised the issue of making the 'retire and return' policy equitable and fair for all.

"Ifti Majid, our Chief Executive, said that compassionate leadership means doing the right thing. The trust values place staff first and he wanted to make the trust a 'great place to work'. That means taking out the 'hard to recruit to' wording of the policy," said Tamera. "When I told Olwyn, she was delighted, but I also had to explain that this was going to take time to progress. Once the policy changes were agreed, each case for 'retire and return' would still need to be determined individually on a business case basis. 'Retire and return' is not without costs and for some services, it still might prove a challenge to administer. She would still have to raise her case to her manager who would escalate up to senior management for approval."



Olwyn's application to retire and return was finally approved a year after her initial application.

"I have over 120 emails in my folder relating to this case and the process has taken nearly six months," said Tamera. "But it will have a significant impact for staff. I have now met with other admin, clerical and clinical staff who were not viewed as 'hard to recruit to', who also hoped to retire and return.

"Olwyn's persistence and refusal to give up have played a significant part in the outcome here. Her case shows what can be achieved when we have confidence in taking concerns further and choosing the right forums to raise concerns within. It also illustrates what happens if we are actively listened to when speaking up," concluded Tamera.

Olwyn said, "Tam was very positive and encouraging and I would not hesitate in speaking up again. I received regular updates from her, each step of the way. In my role, I supervise admin staff, and I have encouraged them to approach the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian if they have anything they want to speak up about."

In my role, I supervise admin staff, and I have encouraged them to approach the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian if they have anything they want to speak up about.

A toxic culture confronted

Large NHS Trust

A worker spoke up about bullying and harassment in a department which had become culturally toxic.

“The guardian stood by me from the moment it was brought to her attention,” said the worker.

Finding their mental health affected by the bullying within the team, the worker had reported it to their manager.

“I was told that ‘there was not enough evidence’ to raise a formal complaint,” said the worker. They contacted the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian after finding out about the work of the guardians on a training course.

“I had a conversation with the guardian on the phone. She gave me updates as they happened, and offered support and reassurance throughout the investigation. Other team members were also able to speak up due to me coming forward.”

Although the worker left the team, they decided to do some work within the trust to raise awareness about bullying, applying to work alongside the guardian to empower and encourage staff to speak up, not only when things go wrong but also when they are working and sharing good practice.

“I would absolutely speak up again,” said the worker. “If it hadn’t been for the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, I do not know where I’d be today. She stood by me every step of the way. I cried, I laughed and even at times, got angry and she did not once pass judgement. I look up to her not only as someone who helped me through one of the most challenging times in my professional life, but also as a mentor whom I can learn from.”

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Nurturing equality and diversity

Stockport NHS Trust

A worker described how when they were recruited, a minority-protected characteristic was shared with their new manager without their consent.

They spoke up to Phil Gordon, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, because they felt they had been bullied and discriminated against. Following discussion, it was agreed that they would proceed informally. An informal meeting was set up with a senior manager to discuss how lessons would be learned in consultation with the worker.

“Open communication with the worker who spoke up to resolve the initial matter led to them being able to use their experiences to make positive contributions in a position of influence,” said Phil. “They are now actively involved in a staff network and in a role where they can positively influence change at organisational level.”



Providing training properly

A Foundation Trust

A worker emailed the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian because they were very disappointed with the way the essential training for porters had been conducted.

They were concerned that the training had been reduced to such an extent that there was no opportunity to raise questions or discuss issues.

“There was no test of whether the information was understood or even read,” said the worker. Essential Training for Porters was reduced previously to ‘Toolbox Training’ and this year reduced further to each porter being required to sign a sheet to confirm they had read the one A4 page of bullet points that was meant to form the basis of a trainer presentation.

The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian met with the Head of Facilities and the Health and Safety Officer who confirmed to her that the training had not been up to the required standard and that in future more extensive and appropriate training would be provided.

“I am confident that the Porters’ training will now be properly provided next year,” said the worker. “Porter training has an impact on staff and patient safety, ensuring safeguarding and it is potentially lifesaving.”

The guardian also escalated the case to the Head of Workforce Development to ensure the quality of essential training was consistent throughout the trust for all workers.

“The recognition that the training was sub-standard and will be improved next year is a major result,” said the worker. “It would not have happened without the involvement of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. I have great respect for both the role and the individual who fills it at my hospital and have recommended her to colleagues. I tried numerous times to raise concerns within my department. Since I have had the support of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian I have had so much more success at being taken seriously.”

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A disruptive colleague

Spire Healthcare



A colleague contacted Jon Nobbs, their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, on their private email out of working hours, as they had a concern about a team member who sat close to them in a small office. They were worried about confidentiality.

They gave Jon a detailed account of bullying and harassment from this colleague, as well as highlighting disturbing behaviours that disrupted work and potentially put confidential data at risk. Patient records were going missing and turning up in random places and a shared inbox was tampered with which disrupted the department and potentially made colleagues appear inefficient or incompetent.

The colleague was distressed and felt unable to go to their own line manager, who had a good working relationship with this colleague. They felt that they may not be believed and were considering seeking new employment.

Jon assured them that they could discuss options with the matron in a confidential environment, which they did. By coming forward, the colleague confirmed some concerns already held by senior staff.

As the situation continued, the colleague also discussed their concerns with their line manager and, following a thorough investigation, the situation with the team member was appropriately resolved.

“This worker has been extremely positive about the Freedom to Speak Up process,” said Jon. “They regularly updated me on how much their work life has improved since the resolution of this situation. It has been immensely gratifying to see the positive change that was able to be made by the safe space that Freedom to Speak Up offers for workers to raise issues.”

“This case highlights to colleagues and our senior management that the Freedom to Speak Up process works well and helps to give confidence in the process,” Jon added. “So much so, that the colleague has volunteered to be one of the hospital’s Freedom to Speak Up Ambassadors, giving an extra channel of communication for their colleagues in their own department and across the wider hospital team.”



Working with temporary workers

Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust value of respect informs their core purpose: to deliver excellent and responsive assessment, treatment and care.

A member of support staff spoke up to Lynn Richardson, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, about some temporary workers who were not exhibiting the trust's values. "Some temporary workers were not following instructions, and acting disrespectfully, for example, by shrugging their shoulders and walking away when asked to do something," said Lynn. "In a mental health setting, working with patients who need careful care, respecting each other is all the more important."

Then, three weeks later, a senior nurse expressed frustration with a lack of support from corporate staff to ensure that temporary workers had appropriate training with suitable IT access. There were issues of safety linked to nurses on the ward being unable to keep care records updated or to report incidents or near misses on the risk system. The senior nurse also highlighted that some temporary workers failed to take instruction from qualified staff.

"We value the part that temporary workers play, but we need to ensure that they exhibit the trust's values and have appropriate training to keep everyone, patients and workers, safe," said Lynn.



The concerns triggered discussions within the nursing management and HR team and helped them explore ways to improve the booking of workers. They developed a strategy to apply booking codes to identify workers who are trained in violence and aggression management, and the trust's care records and incident reporting system. This would also help ward managers book trained workers with the correct level of skills and IT system access, ensuring they have the skills required for a safer shift.

With the overarching aim of creating more competent workers and improving skills, temporary workers are being offered the opportunity of free training when recommended by a manager. The issues raised also highlighted the need to regularly keep reminding workers of the importance of reporting issues when they notice the quality of temporary workers falling below the trust's standards.

The Chief Nurse is keeping this issue under regular review through her various assurance processes, and the trust Board is aware of the issue due to the guardian's quarterly report. Senior Leaders are monitoring the success of this planned new training approach.

Lynn said, "As a result of people speaking up to me, there is an increased awareness of the correct channels for reporting concerns about temporary workers. It highlighted the need to remind workers of established systems. It also highlighted the need for regular communications to help keep my role as the trust guardian in people's minds. Although I had not seen either staff member in person, they knew who to approach and how to make their concerns known in the way that was most comfortable for them. I kept the two workers updated every few weeks via email so they were aware of the proposed changes which were happening as a result of them raising their concerns."

Improving patient pathways

Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Radiographers in the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust noticed that some patients were being transferred from A&E to radiology for imaging in chairs, rather than beds, and sometimes wearing their own clothes instead of hospital gowns. This meant that cannulas were often covered under jumpers and shirts, which led to fluid spills and that X-ray imaging was sometimes poor. Not all patients were being given pain relief in a timely manner and in some cases, this also led to delays in treatment.

Radiographers had raised this as an issue previously, but felt that a broader response was needed so they contacted their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, Terri Vaselli.

Terri escalated the issue to the Associate Director of Nursing from Unscheduled Care, who immediately took action. Staff from A&E, radiographers and senior leaders were brought together to discuss what was underlying the matter.

At the meeting, radiographers and A&E colleagues listened to each other and talked openly about the situation. It soon became apparent that A&E staff were actively promoting the 'End PJ Paralysis' campaign. This encouraged patients to stay in their own clothes, to help reduce falls and pressure ulcers and cut the length of time people spend in hospital.

Radiographer colleagues had simply not been made aware of the campaign.

Terri said, "Honest and open dialogue between departments resulted in a deeper understanding between clinical teams to implement change and improve pathways.

"Being able to talk around the table openly allowed better understanding of each department's functions and rationales. This led to more cohesive teamwork and better patient care."

As a result, the trust has made a number of improvements including:

- Radiology staff providing written guidance for A&E staff about transferring patients into their care.
- The development of new training packs for new starters in A&E.
- A plan to develop a care improvement group, including radiography staff, to further improve patient pathways.
- Inviting radiology staff to Patient Safety Days to talk to A&E teams about their pathway guidance.
- The recruitment of Quality Champions to support radiology and A&E pathways. This will also be rolled out to urgent care to help create more streamlined pathways for patients.
- Staff who spoke up were satisfied with the changes that are being implemented and said that they would speak up again.

Communicating learning

Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust

A member of the community midwifery team came to Susan Clennett, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Kettering General Hospital NHS trust, with a concern about her father-in-law's care in the hospital.

Kerry's father-in-law, Tom, was admitted as an emergency. Due to his sudden illness, Tom was unable to communicate. When he was admitted onto one of the wards, he was assessed as needing bed rails in place to address the risk of falling, but these were not put in place. During the night, Tom fell from his bed and was injured. His condition deteriorated while he was undergoing various tests and assessments.

The family became concerned because, at times, staff failed to keep them updated on results and plan of care. Because of the fall, Tom's injuries and the lack of communication, the family lost confidence in his care; they were worried about Tom's safety when they were unable to be by his side.

Kerry brought her concerns to Susan as the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian because she thought there was scope for organisational learning. Kerry wanted Tom's experience to be used positively to improve safety and quality of care because she believed the safety issues she'd witnessed affected not just Tom, but other patients as well.

Following an investigation and meetings with Susan, together with the Head of Patient Experience and Chief Executive Officer, the trust launched a learning tool and short film called 'Tom's Story'.

The film is shown in facilitated workshops so that every clinician can consider how they will take the learning and experiences of Tom and his family back to their area to identify where they can make improvements. Tom's Story is also available via a link on the intranet page for all staff to access so that they can understand the impact of potentially avoidable patient safety incidents and failure to communicate effectively with relatives.

Kerry's main message to the trust was, "If you say you are going to do something, do it or let the patient and family know why not."

Susan said, "Effective communication is often a theme on feedback to NHS organisations. Kerry's case highlights the need to listen to the views of relatives (who knew Tom the best) and to feed back when promised."

"Tom's story has had a major trust-wide learning impact on both patient safety and how we communicate effectively with patients and their relatives and we're grateful to Kerry and her family for their continued support in sharing Tom's Story as a learning tool."



Patient safety protected

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Trust



At Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Trust, a case came to light of a clinician who spoke to a colleague regarding a senior member of staff working in an inpatient unit. Their colleague recommended that they raise this with the trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

The issue involved a senior ward nurse who gathered staff together to discuss a patient with dementia who had been displaying challenging behaviours such as banging on doors, kicking furniture and assaulting staff.

During the staff briefing, the senior nurse suggested that staff use an unauthorised prevention and management of aggression (PMA) technique to control the patient. Many team members thought this was extreme and unnecessary, but felt unable to voice their concerns as they feared reprisals.

Liz Keay, the trust's guardian, immediately passed this information to the senior manager in charge of the area. They raised this as an incident on Datix, reported it to the police and began

an internal investigation, suspending the senior nurse from duties for the duration. The NMC also conducted a 'Fitness to Practise' investigation.

The individual who reported the incident was kept informed by Liz via their colleague, and remained anonymous to all those involved in reporting and investigating the incident.

After the issue was brought to the guardian, the following changes were made:

- All workers were directed not to undertake the PMA technique in future.
- Managers checked that all staff understood current methods for managing challenging behaviours.
- Improvements were made to investigate incidents faster to speed up this process.

Liz said, "The individual who spoke up found it particularly stressful initially. It was important that I reassured them that it was the right thing to do and thanked them for speaking up, even though this was through a third party. It is vital that workers know they will be listened to when they speak up.

"As time went on, other staff on the ward were able to see actions being taken and improvements being made following their colleague speaking up. I hope this will empower and embolden them to speak up in the future."

Responding to an anonymous case

Salford Care Organisation

At the Salford Care Organisation, part of the Northern Care Alliance, a worker sent an anonymous email to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian about the behaviour of an individual during recruitment. They believed the individual had not followed due process related to the recruitment of internal candidates.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
Karen Hawley escalated the matter to the Associate Director of Workforce. As a result, the director appointed an independent manager to review the interview process as well as the issues which had been raised.

An in-depth review was conducted, which included obtaining the scoring charts from the interviews as well as meeting with the recruiters. From the information available, it transpired the interview process was fair and in accordance with the recruitment and selection guidance. However, the actions and behaviour of one of the interview panel members before the interview had raised some concerns.

In response to this finding, the individual concerned was asked to actively reflect on their actions and behaviours and consider how they could be misconstrued by other workers. They also revisited training about recruitment and selection, and how to deal with difficult situations.

Speaking up resulted in the interviewer reflecting on the situation and being given the opportunity to make improvements. It also gave the organisation the opportunity to look into the matter and gain assurance that due process had been followed.

As the matter was raised anonymously, Karen was unable to provide direct feedback to the worker who had spoken up. However, a message was placed in the trust's newsletter to thank the worker for speaking up and to assure everyone that issues raised anonymously are always listened to and escalated appropriately.

Karen Hawley said, "It was fantastic to see how this issue was taken forward and dealt with by senior leaders so thoroughly and appropriately. It is important that workers are thanked for speaking up and know that matters raised anonymously are listened to and acted upon."

It is important that workers know that matters raised anonymously are listened to and acted upon.

Clarifying boundaries

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

A member of the Endoscopy team spoke up to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian with concerns about blurred boundaries between clinical and non-clinical staff when advising patients about the medications they should cease before attending for endoscopy.

Most Standard Operating Procedures relate to patient care delivered by clinical workers. The need for SOPs for non-clinical workers was recognised because of this concern being raised.

“Sometimes workers acting with the best motives to be helpful can inadvertently cross the boundaries between the role of clinical and non-clinical duties,” said Phil Gardner, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

With the consent of the worker, their concern was confidentially discussed with the Matron for Endoscopy, and flagged to the Chief Nurse, as the Executive Lead for Freedom to Speak Up.

Sometimes workers acting with the best motives to be helpful can inadvertently cross the boundaries between the role of clinical and non-clinical duties.



Two new procedures were developed which made the guidance that non-clinical staff may provide to patients clearer; any other matters must be escalated to the nurse-in-charge.

The new procedures have clarified boundaries for clinical and non-clinical staff and as a result reinforced patient safety and potentially enhanced patient experience. In addition, workers have benefited from having clearly defined parameters in which to work.

“The member of staff who spoke up has reported that the situation has improved after having raised their concern,” concluded Phil.

Making policies work for workers

Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust

At Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust, a concern was brought to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian from a clinical worker. She had transferred to work in the organisation from a neighbouring trust and expressed concerns about the trust's sickness policy.

The worker did not agree with the policy wording, which she felt was not appropriate to cover her absence, and said that the policy in practice had felt detrimental.

Dr Jude Graham, the trust's guardian, arranged a meeting with the staff member. The worker expanded upon her concern, which was not solely about the policy but also about the support she received after returning to work from a family bereavement. The complexity of the issue also resulted in a breakdown in communication between the worker and her manager.

The policy, which was in use within another trust rather than RDaSH, was being used under the TUPE transfer agreement. Once the worker was shown the RDaSH trust policy, she asked to be supported using this, which she felt was more relevant to her situation. The staff member also advocated a review of the categories for absence listed on the electronic recording system.

Over three meetings, facilitated by Jude, the following changes were made:

- The TUPE transfer process and other support for teams who are transferred has been reviewed.
- The process for recording absence has been revised, specifically where absence is for a reason other than sickness and specifically where a staff member is bereaved.
- Information has been made available for staff managers and clinical leaders to provide support to workers they supervise who are bereaved.

A staff focus group has also been established to support staff who may experience domestic violence. This group is designing teaching podcasts for managers and works with the safeguarding team to design a trust policy to support staff who experience domestic violence.

Jude said, "The clinician reflected that through the Freedom to Speak Up process, the actions taken enabled her to feel more supported by the organisation and helped her to reconnect with her managers.

"She explained that her experiences were taken seriously and felt assured that changes have been put in place to support others who may find themselves in a similar position. She would definitely speak up again in the future and also advocates this to others in her team and organisation."

