



Press release

8 June 2023

Decrease in NHS workers' confidence to speak up

National Guardian for the NHS voices fears for patient safety if workers' concerns are not addressed

The National Guardian's Office today (8 June 2023) published its analysis of the questions relating to speaking up in the 2022 NHS Staff Survey.

The Freedom to Speak Up sub-score declined from 6.5 in 2021 to 6.4 in this year's NHS Staff Survey. This fall equates to a 1.5% change in responses to the speaking up questions. Given the numbers who answered these questions (over 600,000 workers) this could be equated to a decrease in over 9,000 workers' confidence to speak up. There were declines on all measures relating to speaking up, both relating to raising concerns about clinical safety and speaking up more generally.

While the results have improved since the 2015 Freedom to Speak Up Review and resulting actions, this continues the fall in NHS workers' confidence to speak up since the pandemic. Of particular concern is the marked fall in how safe people feel to raise a clinical concern.

Speaking up can only bring improvements if leaders and managers listen up and follow up. The corresponding question about whether people feel that if they spoke up, their concerns would be addressed has also shown a deterioration. This creates a worrying picture of potentially increasing disillusionment and a feeling that speaking up is futile.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS said: *"It is not acceptable that two in five workers responding to the NHS staff survey do not feel able to speak up about anything which gets in the way of them doing their job."*

"These survey responses show us that there is a growing feeling that speaking up in the NHS is futile – that nothing changes as a result. When workers speak up about concerns, including the impact of under staffing and a crumbling infrastructure, their leaders themselves may struggle to be heard when trying to address these concerns."

"I would add my voice to that of others that this urgently needs to be addressed."

"Failing to do so risks compounding this sense that workers do not have the resources they need to deliver the high-quality care they want for their patients. With three in ten feeling unsafe to raise clinical concerns, this will have a direct impact on patient safety."

For more information or interviews contact: comms@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

>ENDS<

Notes for editors:

About the Report

Fear and Futility: What can the Staff Survey tell us about speaking up in the NHS?

Published : 8 June 2023

Available from: www.nationalguardian.org.uk

Key Findings

The [NHS Staff Survey](#) results are a valuable resource for understanding the speaking up culture in the NHS. It is one of only a few datasets which provides current, reliable information on workers' current perceptions of how it feels to speak up in their organisations.

A [survey for bank workers](#) was also piloted this year and included the same four questions relating to speaking up as in the core survey. 17,702 bank workers completed the survey (18% response rate), from 115 Trusts.

- The Freedom to Speak Up sub-score declined from 6.5 in 2021 to 6.4 in this year's NHS Staff Survey. This fall equates to a 1.5% change. Given the size of the survey (over 600,000 workers) this equates to a declining perception of over 9,000 workers.
- There was a marked fall for raising concerns relating to clinical practice (following 2021 when there was a marked improvement).
- For the first time, bank staff completed a bank staff survey. The results were in line with the core survey results for all four speak up questions.
- By sector, ambulance trusts continue to score least well (and are continuing to worsen) whereas community trusts continue to perform best.
- The gap between community and ambulance/acute trust results is widening, potentially indicating the impact of pressures on frontline services.
- The Freedom to Speak Up sub-score positively correlates with Care Quality Commission ratings.
- There is a marked disparity between the highest and lowest scoring organisations and this has increased for three out of the four Freedom to Speak Up questions since the 2021 survey. The North East and Yorkshire, North West and South East regions scored the highest. East of England scored least well for all four Freedom to Speak Up questions. In particular,

the results for both questions about workers feeling that their organisations will address concerns were markedly low.

The Freedom to Speak Up sub-score

A Freedom to Speak Up sub-score (called the Raising Concerns sub-score in NHS Staff Survey reports) has been calculated for both the 2021 and 2022 surveys and can be used as a benchmark.

Responses for the questions are rescored to achieve a scale of 0-10. Table 1 below details the scores allocated to each response option. The scores are assigned based on outcome, so the most favourable response will be scored 10, while the least favourable will be scored 0.

The sub-score is calculated as the mean where at least three of the four questions are answered. A higher score indicates a more favourable result.

The four questions used as an indicator of speaking up culture from the 2022 NHS Staff Survey are:

- Q19a - I would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice
- Q19b - I am confident that my organisation would address my (clinical practice) concern
- Q23e - I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in this organisation
- Q23f - If I spoke up about something that concerned me I am confident my organisation would address my concern

Most Improved Trusts in the NHS Staff Survey 2022

Organisation	Benchmarking group	Freedom to Speak Up sub-score 2022	Change from 2021 sub-score	CQC well-led rating
Dudley Integrated Health and Care Trust	Community	7.1	+0.3	Good
First Community Health and Care	Community	7.6	+0.2	Good
East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust	Ambulance	5.5	+0.2	Requires improvement
Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust	Mental Health&Learning Disabilities and Mental Health, Learning Disabilities & Community	6.8	+0.2	Requires improvement
Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust	Acute & Acute Community	6.6	+0.2	Good

CSH Surrey	Community	6.9	+0.2	Good
Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust	Acute & Acute Community	6.4	+0.2	Good
Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	Ambulance	6.1	+0.2	Good
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute & Acute Community	5.9	+0.2	Good
Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust	Acute Specialist	6.8	+0.2	Requires improvement

About the National Guardian's Office

The National Guardian's Office works to make speaking up become business as usual to effect cultural change in the NHS.

The office leads, trains and supports a network of Freedom to Speak Up guardians in England and provides learning and challenge on speaking up matters to the healthcare sector.

The role of Freedom to Speak Up guardians and the National Guardian were established in 2016 following the events at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and recommendations from Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up Inquiry.

There are now over 1,000 Freedom to Speak Up guardians in NHS primary and secondary care and independent sector organisations, national bodies and elsewhere that ensure workers can speak up about any issues impacting on their ability to do their job.

www.nationalguardian.org.uk

About Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Freedom to Speak Up guardians support workers to speak up when they feel that they are unable to do so by other ways. They ensure that people who speak up are thanked, that the issues they raise are responded to, and make sure that the person speaking up receives feedback on the actions taken. Guardians also work proactively to support their organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are appointed by the organisation they support and abide by the guidance issued by the National Guardian's Office. They follow the ['universal job description'](#) issued by the NGO.

You can find your Freedom to Speak Up guardian on the NGO web directory: <https://nationalguardian.org.uk/speaking-up/find-my-fts-guardian/>

About the National Guardian for the NHS



Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark was appointed as National Guardian in December 2021.

She is a registered nurse with more than 30 years' experience in the NHS, higher education, voluntary and private sectors. Prior to her role as National Guardian, she was a non-executive director at NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group where she was also Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

She is the Independent Chair for the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board. She also worked with the NHS England New Care Models Programme for three years as a Clinical Associate and has been working as a consultant and coach with and in the NHS since March 2015. Her specialist clinical area is end of life care in which she was awarded her PhD.