

### **NHS People Plan**

Prerana Issar, NHS Chief People Officer, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) gave the headlines from the [NHS People Plan](#) [published 30 July 2020]. She said the Plan will feature:

- The physical and mental wellbeing of staff, including increasing opportunities to work flexibly and encouragement and support for staff to raise concerns.
- Equality, diversity & inclusion.
- Capturing successful ways of working introduced during the pandemic.
- Workforce supply in the short-term such as utilising returners and making the most of the increased public interest in pursuing a career in the NHS.

The Plan will be about supporting leaders and managers to deliver, with regional People Boards tasked to monitor progress and provide assurance. A longer-term approach to addressing workforce shortages will follow the Government Spending Review in the Autumn.

Sara Gorton, SPF Staff Side Chair, said trade unions supported the focus on the workforce; embedding lessons learnt during the height of the pandemic, and getting the plan published promptly. She said that although the remit of the Plan did not include staff pay and reward, there will be expectation that the hard work of staff during COVID-19 will be recognised financially.

Trade unions requested to work with partners on implementing the Plan, including delivering commitments on workplace culture, flexible working, leadership, and tackling racism. They emphasised the need for evidence-based actions.

Danny Mortimer, NHS Employer Side Chair, thanked NHSEI and HEE colleagues for working with the SPF in developing the People Plan. Employers also welcomed its imminent publication and were keen to work with trade unions and other partners on its implementation. A concern for employers was the immigration system limiting recruitment of social care staff from overseas. This could result in care homes struggling, which would have a serious impact on the NHS.

Gavin Lerner, DHSC, informed the meeting that much of the overseas recruitment, put on hold because of the pandemic, was now restarting and Helen Whately, Minister of State for Care and SPF chair, wants to see increased support to the social care workforce.

In response to a question from a trade union rep, Gavin said that the restoration of the bursary, incentives, and the increased profile of the NHS, had boosted the numbers choosing through clearing to train to be a healthcare professional. There are currently, and it is likely to remain this way, a lot more applicants than training places.

Prerana thanked SPF for its continuing engagement, contributions to, and support for the People Plan.

### **Protecting Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) NHS staff**

Dr Na'eem Ahmed, consultant radiologist at Chelsea & Westminster NHS Foundation Trust had attended previous SPF meetings to speak about the NHSEI work programme to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME staff. NHSEI had sent a letter on 24 June,

requiring organisations to demonstrate progress on risk assessments within two weeks and complete them for at least all staff in at risk groups within four weeks. NHS organisations had been encouraged in the letter to make risk assessment data available to staff to help transparency and accountability.

BAME networks in NHS trusts are having a powerful role in supporting risk assessment processes and significant progress is being made. A central assurance board will assess the state of play and identify next steps in August.

Trade unions asked about measures to address any employers struggling to carry out all risk assessments. Na'eem said that NHSEI is taking a positive not punitive approach as they recognise, due to the complexity of the situation in some trusts, 100 per cent compliance may not be possible.

Danny said employers do want to undertake risk assessments to protect their staff, but some may struggle to do so, within the required timeframe, without support from NHSEI. Trade union reps in NHS organisations also have a role to play in helping with risk assessments. An employer rep added that risk assessments are a continuous process, a trust may have 100 per cent compliance in August but the process should not stop there, and further assessments may be required if circumstances change.

Trade unions:

- Highlighted that some staff were unwilling to take part in a risk assessment because they were worried about being redeployed, resulting in a loss of income. A no detriment policy, as agreed in the London SPF, would be a way to address this.
- Were concerned that if staff who were self-isolating do not return to their role their employer would start capability procedures against them.
- Asked about whether the national evaluation will look at the effectiveness of interventions resulting from risk assessments and whether any common themes will be identified.
- Asked about the link to provision of PPE.
- Requested the SPF take action which leads to an improvement in the experience at work for BAME staff.

Na'eem advised that risk assessments should inform PPE use and the national evaluation will look at steps taken by employers in response to risk assessments. He agreed to return to SPF again to update once the data from the centralised collection was available in August.

Partners agreed to discuss an SPF aspiration and related activity, to improve the workplace experience of NHS BAME staff, at the next COVID-19 SPF Engagement Group meeting.

### **Regulation – changes to fitness to practice**

Mark Bennett, Deputy Director Professional Regulation, DHSC said that the COVID-19 pandemic had made it very challenging for the professional regulators to discharge their statutory function so changes to the regulations were made to enable virtual hearings and to use electronic communication. These changes were now being introduced on a permanent basis. Trade unions had raised concerns about the changes being made with a shorter consultation or, in the case of most professional regulators, without consultation.

They believed there could be privacy issues arising from virtual hearings, they could negatively impact on a registrant whose first language is not English, and that in complex cases, conducting things virtually may make it harder for the registrant to get a fair hearing.

The Forum agreed that a meeting will be convened between DHSC, trade unions, the regulators, and the Professional Standards Authority to identify ways in which to address trade union concerns.

### **Test and trace COVID-19 App**

Simon Thompson, Managing Director of the COVID-19 App said that the App has been developed and now works. They plan to test the App before it goes out for mass adoption.

The SPF asked about changing the current negative public perception of the App so that people are prepared to download and use it. They also stressed the need to educate the public about the App, how it works and how to use it.

Simon acknowledged these points. A longer discussion with partners would be arranged where Simon can demonstrate how the App works, have a discussion about ensuring the App is trusted and credible, and agree how the SPF could help promote use of the App to their members, where appropriate.