

### Welcome and introductions

Minister for Care, Helen Whately welcomed everyone to the meeting on a day when there has been a surge of optimism following the MHRA approval of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

### COVID-19 mass vaccination programme

Tom Simons, chief HR and OD officer at NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) spoke about the vaccination programme and some of the logistical difficulties. NHS and social care staff who are in patient facing roles and staff identified as high risk will be a priority to receive the vaccine, with all NHS staff to be offered the vaccine.

NHSEI is standing up 40 to 50 hospitals to deliver the vaccine to staff. There is a massive workforce challenge to ensure effective operation of primary care, hospital, and mass vaccination hubs. In response to a national recruitment campaign 80 to 100,000 people had volunteered to support the vaccination programme. These people will need training and support to ensure they are able to vaccinate safely.

Trade unions welcomed the useful Public Health England (PHE) COVID-19 vaccination [guidance](#) for health and social care workers and offered to contribute to communications to boost trust in the vaccine - using evidence on its safety and efficacy. They highlighted the importance of agreeing the employment model for vaccinators and requested staff not be redeployed to give the vaccine if it has a negative impact on service delivery. They referenced the advice to not vaccinate pregnant women as it had not been tested on this group and they should receive the vaccine following pregnancy.

Trade unions requested that where possible staff have the vaccine where they work, and it be delivered by their peers. They asked for reassurance that a medical professional will be available to provide support in the small number of cases where an individual has an adverse reaction to the vaccine. Trade unions also asked about plans to vaccinate staff who are not at work such as those who are shielding and said that staff who choose not to be vaccinated should not suffer detriment as a result, for example access to sick pay.

Trade unions quoted statistics which showed that a high proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff did not want to have the vaccine due to mistrust. Communications need to be nuanced to reflect the concerns of these staff and the BAME community. Tom acknowledged the need to build trust amongst BAME staff and Prerana Issar the chief people officer is leading work on this through tapping into BAME networks and advocates in BAME communities.

Occupational health guidance for the vaccination programme was in development and this will include information on vaccinating staff who are shielding. Provision of the vaccination programme will be a challenge and it is likely that staff will be asked to go to hub centres to receive the vaccine. NHSEI is working through the practicalities of this.

Minister informed the meeting that the social care team in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is working with the vaccination team on the best model for vaccinating social care staff. She said vaccinating care home staff was a top priority.

### Royal College of Nursing (RCN) cultural ambassador project in the North East

Chris Rowlands equality and diversity lead, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW) spoke about the implementation of the RCN [cultural ambassador project](#) in his trust. Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data for the trust, although better than the national average, showed that BAME staff in CNTW had a worse experience compared to their white colleagues, in particular BAME staff were more likely to be investigated and go through a disciplinary process. The project was endorsed by the trust's board and trade unions assisted with promotion of the cultural ambassador role. The project coincided with the development of the trust's BAME network, which provided a source of cultural ambassadors. Recruits attended a three day training course run by the RCN. This gave them information about the role and how they could support better investigations and disciplinaries through identifying possible bias in the process because of an appellant's race. The RCN also ran regional action and learning sets in which cultural ambassadors could network and share their experiences.

Although early in the project, cultural ambassadors at CNTW had resulted in fewer cases going to a hearing. The trust was looking at possibly expanding the cultural ambassador role beyond disciplinaries and grievances to help with organisational change processes - to ensure these do not have a detrimental impact on BAME staff.

Tanya Pretswell, staff side secretary, UNISON at CNTW said that trade unions in the trust, linking with the head of workforce and the BAME network were building on the success of the cultural ambassador project through a campaign to tackle racism, show racism the red card.

There is a region-wide approach in the North East to progressing the cultural ambassador project. Karen Pearce, head of equality, diversity and inclusion (people), The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said her trust's WRES data had not shown an increased likelihood of BAME staff entering formal disciplinary processes but they had implemented the cultural ambassador project as a supportive measure to enhance their processes. In the trust, cultural ambassadors who were unfamiliar with disciplinary procedures were able, as part of their training, to shadow HR officers to increase their knowledge of how it all operated. The trust was evaluating the project with initial signs that it was having a positive impact.

SPF trade union reps thanked Chris, Tanya and Karen for their presentation and suggested that the national SPF look into sharing the learning from the good work on improving the workplace experience of BAME staff going on around the country. The SPF secretariat was asked to follow up on this request.

### **NHSEI's equality, diversity and inclusion programme**

Jenni Douglas-Todd, joint director of equality and inclusion at NHSEI said she was pleased to attend her first Wider Group meeting. She said NHSEI's priorities on equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) are set by the NHS People Plan. They will aim to achieve outcomes that promote equity and inclusion in staff safety, health and wellbeing and in recruitment and retention processes. The actions on how to do this, along with the measures to identify progress are in development. Jenni said the SPF is a key vehicle to support positive change in EDI in the NHS.

The first wave of the pandemic had shown that some line managers struggle to have conversations with their BAME staff on how it feels for them working in the NHS and being at higher risk from the virus. In the first wave 96 per cent of staff from a BAME background had been risk assessed. In the second wave NHSEI wanted to ensure that risk assessments were part of the normal workforce planning process to ensure staff are appropriately protected.

The national WRES report for 2020 was to be published soon. The report will be framed in the context of the pandemic and the black lives matter movement. It will paint a picture of the inequalities in the NHS and what could be done differently and what is expected of people. A new lead for the WRES had been appointed and they were due to start on 7 December.

The BAME clinical advisory group was thinking through messaging, using evidence and balanced information to counter negative and adverse commentary on social media directed at the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Trade unions identified the need to include bank, agency and contractors in data collections for WRES and the need for interventions that evidence has shown to be effective. They asked what about the best way to involve trade unions in NHSEI's EDI work. Jon Restell said Managers in Partnership is scoping a resource for line managers on race and he asked to consult with Jenni's team on their plans before they pursue it.

Jenni said the EDI team are reviewing the strategic advisory group and the WRES governance structures and she agreed to work with MiP on their guidance. She also agreed to continued partnership working with trade unions and NHS Employers on EDI policy such as NHS recruitment and promotion practices.

### **SPF stocktake 2021**

The plan for the SPF internally led stocktake 2021 was agreed. This will focus on how the SPF had responded to COVID-19, lessons learnt and progress against the 2019 stocktake action plan. The aim is to have a report finalised by April 2021.

### **Any other business**

Rebecca Smith, managing director of NHS Employers and SPF colleagues thanked Victoria Small, SPF programme manager for all her work on the SPF over a number of years. Victoria was leaving for a new role in NHSEI to assist with their NHS staff health and wellbeing work programme.

**Next meeting of the Wider Group meeting will take place on Thursday 25 February 2021.**