



NATIONAL SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP FORUM – WIDER GROUP KEY COMMUNICATIONS – 6 DECEMBER 2011

At the meeting of the national Social Partnership Forum on 6 December, partners discussed a range of issues including QIPP, Health & Well-Being and Unionlearn. Chaired by Health Minister Simon Burns, the meeting was joined by his ministerial colleague Anne Milton.

Introduction

After welcoming everyone to the SPF, the Minister gave a quick update on progress since the last meeting. The Future Forum had published its interim findings on 17th November, which had informed the NHS Operating Framework published on 24th November. Jan Sobieraj, Managing Director, NHS & Social Care Workforce, spoke briefly about the DH transition process and that, although some functions would transfer out of the Department to the NHS Commissioning Board and emerging organisations including Health Education England, there would remain a strong presence in SPF to engage on workforce issues. Partners welcomed this, agreeing it should provide continuity to partnership working.

Trade unions acknowledged the TUC-led National day of action on 30th November. Christina McAnea, staff side, highlighted the good work that had gone on between employers and trade unions nationally, regionally and locally to ensure essential services were maintained and patient safety was not compromised. Dean Royles, NHS Employers, agreed that there had been collaborative work which had helped most employers manage effectively.

HR Transition Partnership Event

Jon Restell, staff side, updated the SPF on the [HR Transition Event](#), which had been held on 5 December. The event had been attended by employer and staff side representatives from across the NHS, ALBs and DH, and provided engagement with the DH policy leads dealing with the Transition resulting from the health reforms. Jon, one of the presenters at the event, highlighted four themes that had emerged:

- a desire for improved communication on Transition;
- how to ensure capacity within management and trade unions, particularly in HR departments to manage the Transition effectively;
- a request for more information on commissioning support; and,
- how to ensure partnership working continues during the Transition and in the future as new organisations are established.

The [HR Transition Partnership Forum](#), which is a sub group of the SPF, will continue to engage on the issues raised at the event.

Employers advised there was a cautious response to the suggestion that all staff affected by the transition should receive a letter notifying them how transition may affect them, as it could raise expectations and cause undue anxiety. It was acknowledged however that staff in SHAs, PCTs and ALBs were already anxious about their futures and wanted to know as much as possible about how transition was likely to affect them. Jan said that a letter should follow a conversation between

manager and individual staff member; the content should not be a surprise and should help manage expectations about the transition process for individuals.

Ensuring the NHS is prepared for flu

The staff flu vaccination campaign is progressing well. Dean Royles said that NHS Employers working in partnership with Trade unions and DH, had produced a whole range of material to support the campaign including active use of social media. They are also using a variety of media outlets to ensure the message gets through to the NHS. This had led to a 300% improvement in the number of staff vaccinated at the end of October 2011 compared to the same point the previous year. The Minister thanked partners for their work on this. Dean will provide a further update on progress at the next meeting.

Partnership under Pressure session at the NHS Employers' Conference

The NHS Employers' conference took place on 15th and 16th November 2011. SPF hosted a session at the conference entitled '[Partnership under Pressure](#)'. Christina McAnea who chaired the session, said that the two presenters Rosemary Exton and Peter Totterdill from UKWON had delivered an interesting presentation, which included case study examples of good partnership working in the UK and overseas. According to UKWON research, direct participation from staff in partnership working correlates highly with improved performance but particularly when it is linked to representative participation.

QIPP - Right Care Workstream

Matt Tagney, DH advised the forum that despite additional resource being invested in the NHS demography, a rising demand for health care and an increasing drugs bill means that DH had calculated that the NHS needs to make up to £20 billion worth of efficiency savings by 2015 and had asked the NHS to achieve this by focusing on areas that improved quality and productivity simultaneously. To help the NHS achieve this, DH has worked with the NHS to develop national workstreams such as the QIPP - Right Care workstream. The Right Care workstream is about reducing unwarranted variation by publishing information that allows clinicians, commissioners and providers to compare themselves with their peers. Matt said that some degree in variation in the quality of care is inevitable and this is sometimes the result of innovators putting in place specific improvements and so driving their outcomes or performance up, which the Department is keen to encourage.

An Atlas of Variation has been developed to support the NHS in this area and the Department was planning to publish an update to that Atlas shortly. This will include more data and twice as many maps and will be available as a web resource. Dean Royles on behalf of employers supported this initiative, as it would give valuable data for managers to engage with clinicians on discussions on improving the quality of services. It is important that this is presented in a developmental way. Staff side agreed and emphasised the importance of information being accessible and for there to be clarity about the possible impact on the workforce. Partners decided that the national SPF should flag up to their colleagues in local and regional partnerships when Atlas 2 is published and encourage them to use the data to see how they could improve the services they are providing to patients. [update: Atlas 2 now published and [available here](#)]

NHS HEALTH & WELL-BEING

The Health and Well-being of staff in the NHS is of great importance to the SPF. Not only is it good for staff personally but is also linked to better patient care. Phillip Smith from DH spoke about achieving the Boorman Report ambition to reduce sickness absences in the NHS by a third which would result in £555 million savings each year. The Department had been working with NHS Employers to support line managers improve standards in occupational health services and encourage staff to take a personal responsibility for their own health and well-being. With the latter, Phillip highlighted a range of initiatives that were going on in organisations such as weight management courses. Staff side welcomed these initiatives. They did say that ill health such as

musculoskeletal or mental health problems were often the result of particularly taxing and stressful work NHS staff carried out and there needs to be measures taken to recognise and reduce the risks of work-related injury and ill health.

Raj Bhamber, representing employers spoke about an initiative at her trust which had been suggested by her local CSP representative to provide a physio service for staff. This is helping to reduce the number and time staff spend off sick so the organisation can provide a better service to the public. It was noted that the problem of 'presenteeism' was highlighted in the Boorman Report, where staff continued to report for work when they were unwell. The forum agreed staff should be supported to be fit and well to ensure they are able to provide the best service for patients. Christina McAnea, staff side chair, reported that the Staff Council is currently looking at the issue of fast-tracking NHS staff, ensuring they are treated as speedily as possible to enable them to recover and return to work without undue delay.

Presentation on learning and skills

Tom Wilson the Director of Unionlearn attended the SPF for the first time to speak about the TUC's Unionlearn programme. Unionlearn exists to support Trade unions to work with employers to promote a culture of learning in the workplace. The objective is to encourage more staff to receive good quality learning and skills training, ensuring they are properly equipped to undertake their job role, and have opportunities for career development. Tom cited case study evidence that an employer commitment to working in partnership with the Trade unions paid many dividends, including improvements in the quality of the patient experience, increased staff morale and motivation, and financial savings where organisations with a better trained workforce had less reliance on the use of costly agency staff. Learning is also important during Transition as it can help staff develop new skills and enable them to cope better with change. Learning does not always have to be job specific to be of benefit to staff and their organisations. Case studies are available on the [Unionlearn](http://www.unionlearn.org) website.

Tom emphasised that a key driver for embedding a culture of learning within an organisation was the establishment of a partnership learning agreement. It was agreed that all health employers should be encouraged to engage with local staff sides to negotiate a learning agreement and that the partners would work together to promote and encourage this to happen. It was acknowledged that health employers had previously signed up to the NHS Skills Pledge and that a learning agreement would build on this commitment. Dean Royles thanked Tom for the presentation. He said that NHS Employers in their evidence to the consultation on Education and Training had highlighted the importance of ensuring national education and training allocations be available for use across the whole workforce and that staff in bands 1 to 4 should be supported. All partners agreed that following the publication of the final Future Forum report employers, Trade unions and the DH should work together to consider how Unionlearn could enhance policies to support the service.

The Minister closed by thanking everyone for their good work over the past year and wished everyone a good Christmas and New Year.