

An overview from NHS Chief Executive Sir David Nicholson on the challenges facing the NHS, reports on violence against staff, the uptake of the seasonal flu vaccine and how we can work to create a sustainable NHS were some of the topics debated at the February meeting of the Social Partnership Forum.

Introduction

The meeting was chaired by Clare Chapman, Director-General Workforce, in the absence of Minister of State Simon Burns who was performing parliamentary duties relating to the Health and Social Care Bill.

Sir David Nicholson and Ian Dodge

Sir David opened his remarks by explaining that this was a watershed moment for the NHS but not the first time that it had faced significant structural change. He highlighted the impact of the reforms in strengthening local accountability, which would allow the NHS to look outwards, rather than towards Whitehall. He stressed the importance of ensuring that during these times of major change it was vital that the focus remained on delivering high quality care. He believed the key to this was motivated and engaged staff. Sir David recognised that many staff would find the changes – not least the abolition of SHAs and PCTs – very challenging and that some people would face difficult times over the coming months. However, he believed that with effective leadership the workforce would continue to maintain the quality of patient care over the coming period and meet the challenge. Sir David also reiterated the benefits that successful partnership working can bring through a joint approach, and said the success of the NHS in recent years was a testament to this.

Both the staff side and employer representatives welcomed Sir David's attendance at the SPF and raised a number of questions, especially in relation to the need for clear leadership and the impact that price competition may have on the workforce. There was general agreement that engagement and partnership working are both key to ensuring that workforce policy is at the forefront of discussions. Sir David reiterated the need for ensuring that effective tools were in place to allow staff attitudes, morale and engagement to be monitored as this was a vital lead indicator to alert the partners to potential issues of concern across the NHS.

Ian Dodge from the Department of Health then updated the forum on the current progress of the Health Bill and the discussions taking place at Committee stage and stressed again the importance of SPF members feeding their views back to the Department.

Violence against NHS staff

The forum received a report from the Department of Health and the Security Management Service (SMS) on physical assaults against NHS staff. The forum discussed a number of issues including assaults by patients which are related to their medical condition, the problem of apparent under-reporting of assaults, and the issue of pursuing criminal prosecutions against those committing the assaults. The SMS outlined a proposed research project that would look at how the number of assaults by patients related to their medical condition could be reduced, and what actions could be taken locally.

Flu vaccination uptake amongst healthcare workers

Dr Dorian Kennedy from the Department of Health attended the meeting to seek SPF's support for increasing the uptake of the seasonal flu jab amongst healthcare workers. Dr Kennedy reiterated the importance of staff receiving the jab as this would reduce the risk to themselves, their families, the patients they care for and would also reduce sickness absence across the NHS. All member of the SPF supported the call for a national campaign to increase vaccination rates. SPF members agreed to share good practice so that others could learn from it and stressed the need for clinical leadership to ensure take up rates were improved in the medical and nursing workforce. It was agreed that plans outlining campaign proposals should be brought back to the May meeting of the forum.

NHS Quarter 2 Finance report

The meeting received a short report summarising the financial returns for the second quarter of 2010/11. The report showed that SHAs and PCTs are forecasting an overall surplus of around £1.2bn, which is 1.3 per cent of total revenue resources. Janet Perry from the Department of the Health explained that this forecast surplus was in line with the revised Operating Framework and would help ensure that funds were available for improving quality and meeting the demands of the transition facing the NHS.

Centre for Workforce Intelligence

Peter Sharp, Chief Executive of the Centre for Workforce Intelligence (CfWI) attended the meeting to outline the business plan for the Centre. Peter explained the work the Centre was doing to improve workforce planning in the NHS and the tools and resources it was developing to improve the quality of the planning process. He outlined new areas of work including increased emphasis on social care, a focus on the allied health professions and the inclusion of public health. He stressed that the Centre would welcome further collaboration with SPF partners on other areas of work.

Creating a Sustainable NHS

June Lancaster and James McKenzie from the NHS Sustainable Development Unit briefed the forum on the work of the Unit on preparing a Route Map for Sustainable Health. June explained the work of the Unit to date. She explained that she was seeking the support of the SPF in spreading the messages further. Forum members welcomed the report and provided a number of concrete examples of where work was already happening in trusts.

There was also a discussion around the importance of ensuring that the issue was embedded in the commissioning process. It was agreed that the SPF would take an active part in promoting this agenda and encouraging trusts to support the Unit's work, including publicising the work through the SPF website.

The Route Map for Sustainable Health is a collaborative effort across the NHS and its partners to describe a sustainable health system and the components that are needed to achieve it. Above all, it forms the basis for highlighting opportunities and coordinating action across six key strands so sustainable healthcare can be implemented at a local, regional, national and international level. Trusts can find out more about the Route Map and sign up to support the work on the [SDU's website](#).

SPF Event

Gill Bellord of NHS Employers updated the meeting about plans for the SPF event on 29 March 2011. Gill outlined the key aims of the event and thinking about what partnership working could look like in the future and ensuring that good practice was maintained after the demise of the SHAs. Full details are available on the [SPF website](#) and all partners committed to encourage bookings.