social partnership forum

Tackling Bullying in the NHS
A collective call to action

December 2016

Introduction
Tackling bullying in the NHS

The NHS Constitution sets out the values that underpin everything we do in the NHS. To deliver the best possible care to patients, we need to create healthy, supportive, positive cultures in our organisations. Innovation and change thrive where there are conditions for healthy challenge, stretch and accountability. Creating cultures of compassionate care is a key task for leaders at all levels of the NHS. There is no place for bullying in compassionate cultures.

Good staff engagement can improve patient outcomes and boost productivity. Indicators of good staff engagement, including prevalence of bullying, are amongst the key indicators looked at by commissioners and regulators.

The NHS staff survey has repeatedly shown that about a quarter of staff feel bullied by their managers, subordinates or colleagues. This is unacceptable. Bullying can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and disengagement in affected individuals. This in turn impacts on their organisations, leading to low morale, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism and poorer patient care including clinical errors, adverse events and compromised safety. A much higher proportion of BME staff report harassment, bullying or abuse by staff in the last 12 months compared to white staff (NHS England, 2016). The NHS has an opportunity to improve the experience of staff working in the NHS by tackling bullying and creating positive cultures.

While robust systems to spot and tackle bullying should be in place in all organisations, bullying is often a symptom of wider issues. Working in partnership to develop a healthy workplace culture, where all staff are clear about expectations can help identify and address the causes of bullying.

Leaders across the NHS are committed to making a difference by promoting supportive cultures where staff can flourish and problem behaviours such as bullying are tackled. The NHS Social Partnership Forum (SPF), which brings together Department of Health (DH) Ministers and officials, NHS employing organisations, NHS England, Health Education England, NHS Improvement, NHS Employers and trade unions is leading this initiative, and has developed a better understanding of the most effective interventions to tackle bullying, by working with academics to explore the evidence and gathering experiences from within the NHS and beyond.

The SPF wants to encourage and support organisations to take further action. We are committed to making improvements at system, organisation and individual level with our goal being that NHS organisations, through excellent, compassionate leadership, provide a supportive culture where staff can flourish and bullying disappears.

National organisations are committed to embedding principles of compassionate leadership throughout the NHS, including in a regulatory, performance management or commissioning context, so that conversations between organisations are empowering and focussed on improvement, working in partnership to develop a healthy workplace culture. Cultures of compassionate care in all our organisations will allow staff to thrive if there are conditions for healthy challenge and accountability. One important element that can support this are the Freedom to Speak Up guardians that all NHS organisations should now have.

We therefore invite senior leaders in all NHS employers to work in partnership with their trade union representatives to undertake preparatory work and commit to action on how they will:

- achieve the overarching leadership and cultural change to tackle bullying in partnership with staff
- support staff to respectfully challenge problem behaviours in the meantime
- publish their plans and progress so staff, patients and the public can hold them to account.

This document:

- sets out our ambition
- challenges all organisations to explore their cultures in partnership with staff, commit to positive action and track progress
- offers a checklist of actions to reduce bullying
- provides evidence-based approaches and tips for using metrics and measures to track progress
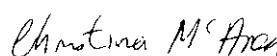- links to further resources.

We value everyone's contribution to our NHS and hope that this collective call to action contributes to the creation of a culture that is healthy, safe and fit for the future.

Philip Dunne
Minister of State for Health

Daniel Mortimer
Chief Executive, NHS Employers

Christina McAnea
National Secretary for Health, UNISON

The Social Partnership Forum (SPF) has agreed that our goal and ambition for the collective call to action should be:

Agreed goal

For NHS organisations to provide excellent, compassionate leadership in a supportive culture where staff can flourish and problem behaviours such as bullying disappear.

Agreed ambition

- For all NHS organisations to respond to the collective call to action on how they will:

  - achieve the overarching leadership and cultural change to tackle bullying in partnership with staff

  - support staff to respectfully challenge problem behaviours in the meantime

  - publish their plans and progress so staff, patients and the public can hold them to account.

- To achieve measurable change in NHS organisations, which is reflected in the statistics collated at a national level by 2020.

NHS and union participants in a workshop in December 2015 devised the following vision:

We want the NHS to be a great place to work. This means...

- **Individuals** in the NHS feel valued and fulfilled. Expectations of each other are clear, communication is honest. People are able to challenge and be challenged. Feeling confident inspires people to do great work for the benefit of patients. There's an emotional commitment to diversity and recognition of why we joined the NHS. We are all healthier as a result.

- **Organisations** are positive and vibrant places. A new sense of agility and transparency means we are great places to work. We are proud of our staff and proud of the communities we serve.

- **The NHS** is more resilient and more able to cope with change. The system listens and responds, modelling the right behaviours. We create trust by holding ourselves to account. We are more diverse, productive and financially viable. Outcomes are better for patients because our staff feel satisfied.

We invite all employers and trade unions in the NHS to undertake preparatory work then commit to actions on how they will:

- achieve the overarching leadership and cultural change to tackle bullying in partnership with staff

- support staff to respectfully challenge problem behaviours in the meantime

- publish their plans and progress so staff, patients and the public can hold them to account.

There is no single solution to tackling bullying. Drawing on experience from within the NHS and other sectors, the SPF has assembled a checklist to help NHS organisations:

- develop positive cultures, led from the top

- recognise bullying and tackle it early and respectfully

- embed tackling bullying into recruitment, induction, supervision and appraisal conversations

- increase understanding of what constitutes bullying

- enable managers to build skills and management styles to tackle bullying

- encourage better team working focused on achieving goals and overcoming problems

- design jobs that give managers an appropriate number of direct reports and time to manage

- understand the predictors and symptoms of bullying and interrogate data so that action can be taken and monitored.

We invite organisations to take action by assessing how you are doing against the checklist and identify where you might have areas for improvement.

Think about how you might:

- engage staff in conversations about positive and less-positive behaviours

- broaden the range of measures, metrics and intelligence used to assess cultures and track progress in tackling bullying

- use a partnership approach, working closely with management, staff and trade union representatives to devise an action plan

- partners to make a commitment to change by setting goals for what will be different by when

- publish progress and be held to account by patients and staff.

Take action that works

This is a summary of evidence-based actions that are proven to reduce bullying.

- A culture should be established in which staff have a heightened awareness of workplace bullying, negative behaviours are challenged and positive behaviours endorsed.

- Focus preventative interventions firstly at leaders and managers, who have the power to prevent and manage bullying and to change the culture.

- When an intervention is introduced, the support of leaders and managers is critical to intervention success.

- Formal policies and procedures should be promoted to outline the organisation's explicit commitment to tackling bullying.

- Use effective training to prevent and manage bullying. Focus on several key mechanisms:

  - developing trainee's insight into their own behaviour and its impact on others

  - creating a shared understanding of acceptable/unacceptable behaviours

  - developing interpersonal, communication and conflict management skills

  - identifying local problems and causes of conflict and generating solutions.

- Training should be delivered to a critical mass of appropriate staff (particularly managers) or it risks being ineffectual.

- Consider mediation for informal resolution of conflict, but be aware of its limitations.

- Use counsellors who have knowledge of bullying and can draw upon a range of integrated therapeutic models.

- Proactive monitoring of organisational data should be considered to identify patterns and outliers to help target interventions.

*Source: **Illing et al, 2013***

Assessing an organisation's culture and measuring change

Taking steps to align organisational culture with strategic objectives is a key part of any action taken to tackle bullying.

An assessment of current organisational culture is a good first step because an organisation can then track its progress and be held to account against an objectively-assessed baseline.

Think about

- Undertaking a culture diagnostic to enhance the information found in the staff survey.

  Resources available to help include:

  - NHS Improvement - Culture & Collective Leadership Diagnostic Resources
  - NHS England - Culture of Care Barometer
  - NHS Employers and the Leadership Academy - Organisational Development Culture Change Tool and App

- Broadening the range of data that informs your work. Use a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. As well as sickness absence and grievance data, look for stories and experiences. Data is all around us, it's what we see and hear as well as what's said (and sometimes not said).

- Making connections with your Freedom to Speak up guardians, HR colleagues and equality leads. They have rich information that can be used to enhance understanding of local contexts and inform progress.

- Taking a snapshot of your current position then setting a goal that you commit to and report on.

- Understanding the importance of how developing people leads to improving care: Developing People – Improving Care, the National Framework for Improvement and Leadership Development

Metrics and Measures

A report by Newcastle University looks at the different surveys that can be used as part of an assessment of bullying prevalence or tracking progress.

- Different surveys can come up with different results depending on whether they offer a definition or threshold of bullying; and ask varying groups and proportions of staff.

- The NHS staff survey asks respondents to self-identify. A target of bullying is completed and published nationally and regularly so NHS organisations can readily look at their own results and benchmark against others.

- NAQ-R or Quine questionnaires are well established survey approaches which would need to be specially commissioned by trusts but would provide more detailed information and offer greater objectivity.

- The Health and Safety Executive's management standards indicator tool

Download the Newcastle report on metrics, and for further information, advice and support on tackling bullying visit NHS Employers tackling bullying in the NHS web page.

A collective call to action

We invite management and trade unions in NHS organisations to respond to the collective call to action.

In response to this collective call to action, we will in partnership:

- Identify the nature and extent of bullying in our organisation.
- Talk to our staff about it, listening to and learning from their experiences.
- Set a baseline and goal for improvement.
- Implement an action plan.
- Evaluate our progress.

In our organisation we are proud of our staff and are committed to creating a positive culture where everyone can give their best to our patients.

We have listened to our staff and assessed what's good about our culture and where we can make changes.

We will take the following action:

We will update our regional Social Partnership Forum with our learning, tips and progress by [date].

Signed

CEO / Board Members

Staff Side