



Royal College of Nursing
Shaping nursing since 1916

RCN position statement

The Role of the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Young People in England

February 2016

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This position statement by the Royal College Nursing (RCN) aims to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children. The need for clarification is essential given the significant loss of expertise nationally and the subsequent challenge to effective succession planning.

The changing NHS architecture has undoubtedly impacted on the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children function, with many being expected to undertake additional commissioning and senior managerial functions, whilst trying to balance the core function of the role. This may include; complex safeguarding case work, maintaining and improving multiagency partnership arrangements and active participation in the work of the local safeguarding children boards.

The recent RCN survey of Designated Nurses for Safeguarding Children and Young People highlighted concerns that NHS England has not provided a stronger challenge to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in how this function has been managed, especially in respect of role overload, competing demands and dilution of functions of the designated nurse role. The impact of the NHS changes is not reported to have impacted on the designated doctor role and function for safeguarding children in the same way.

What are conflicts of interest?

The 2014 edition of the intercollegiate framework Safeguarding children and young people: roles and competences for health staff; Intercollegiate Document (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2014) recognised the increasing complexity of both the designated doctor and designated nurses roles and made clear recommendations about the level of resource required to safeguard children and young people. In addition to this Working Together to Safeguard Children (Department for Education, 2015) was also re-issued and subsequently the NHS England Accountability and Assurance Framework was revised (NHS England, 2015).

There are significant concerns that many designated nurses may have conflict of interest due to the competing nature of their commissioning and expert roles. A conflict of interest occurs where an individual's ability to exercise judgement, or act in a role, is, or could be, impaired or otherwise influenced by his or her involvement in another role or relationship. The individual does not need to exploit their position or obtain an actual benefit, financial or otherwise, for a conflict of interest to occur (NHS England, 2014)

Concluding statement

The Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children provides safeguarding, child protection expertise and leadership throughout health and multi-agency partnerships. The role is pivotal to complex case management, improved partnership working, strategic planning, quality assurance and performance monitoring. It is essential when advising on the development and provision of services. CCGs and the NHS need a much greater awareness of and commitment to the role to ensure that these key professionals are able to undertake their core function to adequately safeguard and protect the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people within their geographical footprint.

Key recommendations

- CCGs should have access to the expertise of the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, the establishment being in line with the requirements of the intercollegiate guidance.
- The Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children role is distinct and should not be combined with other designated nurse roles or functions, for example vulnerable adults.
- The designated function should be a strategic post without any responsibilities for individual children or young people.
- Safeguarding supervision arrangements should be in place to meet statutory requirements and promote safe practice across the health economy.

References

Department of Education (2015) *Working Together to Safeguard Children* <https://www.gov.uk/.../working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

NHS England (2014) *Managing Conflicts of Interest: Statutory Guidance for Clinical Commissioning Groups* www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/man-confl-int-guid

NHS England (2015) *Safeguarding Vulnerable People in the Reformed NHS Accountability and Assurance Framework* www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/safeguarding

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2014) *Safeguarding children and young people: roles and competences for health care staff*. London: RCPCH www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/page/SafeguardingChildren



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