

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN THE NHS

The Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and development opportunities. With around 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

Impact on nursing staff

No-one at work should feel they are bullied – it's unacceptable behaviour that can have a devastating impact on individuals and must not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Health boards across Scotland must provide staff with reassurance that they will take all complaints seriously. Health boards and managers also need to be more proactive, listen to their staff and change the workplace culture for the benefit of staff and patients.

31% of RCN Scotland members who responded to a 2017 survey on employment issues said they had experienced bullying or harassment by colleagues. Of these, only 40% said that they had reported the incident, with a lack of confidence that anything would change the top reason for not reporting.

The importance of a Safety Culture

Tackling bullying and harassment is vital for patient safety. For a safe organisation, staff need to be confident that doing the right things – reporting incidents, near misses and concerns – are all welcomed and encouraged. They need to know that the organisation will focus on system learning, not individual blame, and believe they are psychologically safe when raising concerns.

The link between staff feeling safe to report patient safety risks and outcomes is clear. There is also a link between staff wellbeing and patient outcomes.

The Sturrock report highlights a culture within an NHS Board that does not support staff or promote

psychological safety of staff when raising patient safety concerns. The challenge, which every health board must reflect on and action, is creating a culture that values opinions, allows concerns to be raised, and supports all individuals who provide health and care services. Staff must feel valued and supported.

RCN Scotland bullying at work workshops

RCN Scotland has been running free workshops for nurses, health care support workers and nursing students which help individuals to better understand the signs of bullying and introduce tools and techniques to help deal with poor behaviour at work.

Since starting our bullying at work workshops in 2016 we have supported 172 members across Scotland and have received positive feedback:

“This type of awareness should be available to all staff at all levels to raise awareness & empower people to do something to change the negative behaviour”

“We need more workshops like this. People suffer bullying anonymously & alone. More bullying & harassment goes on than is reported, need more openness & awareness.”

Staffing for safe and effective care

Staffing for safe and effective care has been enshrined in law with the passing of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act in May. However, passing the Act was just the first step and we are now looking at what we need to do to work with government to ensure the guidance, and any secondary legislation, supports implementation. There is significant work to be done if this legislation is to make a real difference.

For example, the processes for assessing and escalating real time risk relating to staffing levels must function in a way that gives nursing staff the confidence to report concerns and have those concerns acted upon.

Further information

If you would like any further information please contact Niki Stark, Public Affairs Officer, by email at niki.stark@rcn.org.uk or by telephone 0131 662 6172.