

Highest numbers of speaking up cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up guardians recorded

Thursday 6 July, 2023

Over 25,000 cases have been brought to Freedom to Speak Up guardians throughout 2022/23, but levels of anonymity are reducing

The National Guardian's Office today (6 July 2023) [publishes the latest annual speaking up data report](#), which summarises the themes and learning from the speaking up data shared by Freedom to Speak Up guardians.

The number of cases brought to them last year was the highest recorded, a 25% increase on the previous year. During Quarter 3 of 2022 (October to December), guardians reported the highest ever number of cases raised in a single quarter, 6,947 cases.

There are now over 1,000 Freedom to Speak Up guardians supporting healthcare workers to speak up about anything which has an impact on their ability to do their job if they do not feel able to by other means. Freedom to Speak Up guardians have handled over 100,000 cases since the National Guardian's Office first started collecting data in 2017.

The report also reveals a decline in the proportion of cases reported anonymously, indicating a growing confidence in the guardian route. In 2022/23, 9.3 percent of cases were reported anonymously. This continues the downward trajectory from 2017, when 17.7% of cases were raised anonymously.

Poor behaviour and its impact remains a cause for concern, with the highest proportion of cases – 30 percent - involving inappropriate behaviours and attitudes. A decrease in the percentage of cases related to bullying or harassment (31.8 percent in 2021/22 to 21.7 percent in 2022/23) can be attributed to cases being reported against this new category. One in every four cases raised (27.4%) involved an element of worker safety or wellbeing.

Poor behaviours also have an impact on patient safety. Nineteen per cent (19.3%) of cases involved an element of patient safety/quality this year, up from 18.8% in 2021/22.

Despite the improvement in levels of anonymity, detriment for speaking up remains a concern. Although there has been a drop in percentage (to 3.9%) given the rise in numbers, this equates to 1,000 cases.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS, said, *"No one should be punished for doing the right thing. When people speak up it is because they want things to improve – whether that is for the safety and quality of care for patients or the working environment for colleagues.*

"Over four-fifths (82.8%) of those who gave feedback to their guardian about their experience said they would speak up again. It is their comments which highlight why the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is so important and the benefits it can bring for worker wellbeing, staff retention and patient care.

"My heartfelt thanks to all those who have spoken up to a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian in the past year. You have provided 25,000 opportunities for learning and improvement for the benefit of patients and colleagues."

For more information or interviews contact: comms@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

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