

More needs to be done to support Freedom to Speak Up guardians and improve speaking up culture in healthcare

Thursday 12 January, 2023

Leaders at all levels urged to do more to support workers to speak up, by listening and following up

The [Annual Report of the National Guardian for the NHS](#) is today (12 January 2023) laid before Parliament, highlighting the work of Freedom to Speak Up guardians and the National Guardian's Office in making speaking up business as usual.

The laying of the report, a commitment called for by the Secretary of State in his response to the events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, had been delayed due to parliamentary changes and the death of Her Majesty.

There are now over 900 Freedom to Speak Up guardians supporting healthcare workers in England to speak up about anything which impacts on their ability to do their job. Over 20,000 cases have been brought to them last year, remaining at the record level set in 2020/21 (20,362, compared with 20,388 in 2020/21). Freedom to Speak Up guardians have handled over 75,000 cases since the National Guardian's Office first started collecting data in 2017.

The report features case studies from across England and different healthcare providers, sharing the experiences of people who have spoken up and the difference Freedom to Speak Up guardians are making. In the words of one group of workers, *"It finally felt that we were being listened to and our opinions and thoughts mattered."*

In her foreword to the report, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy, Maria Caulfield MP, said: *"We know this is a challenging time for the NHS as we emerge from the pandemic. In such times, it is even more crucial we listen to the voices of those on the frontline by ensuring there is an environment in which staff feel confident they can speak up and that when they do, they will be heard and their concerns acted upon. This is an important priority for the government and for me personally."*

"Through the work of the National Guardian's Office, the Freedom to Speak Up guardians, and the commitment of NHS staff, I am confident that we can deliver an NHS where speaking up becomes business as usual as this will help the NHS to provide high quality and safe care to patients."

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS, said: *"I am delighted to place our Annual Report before Parliament. The Freedom to Speak Up movement has been a catalyst for positive change but there is still much more to be done."*

"This report outlines some of the work which the National Guardian's Office has been undertaking across the healthcare system to ensure that Freedom to Speak Up is implemented consistently within organisations. This is a vital element to high quality, safe and effective care, and essential for the wellbeing and retention of workers."

The report also shares intelligence and learning collated by the National Guardian's Office, including [speaking up data](#) shared by Freedom to Speak Up guardians of the cases they receive. While levels of anonymity have decreased, (10.4% in 2021/22, down from 11.7% in 2020/21), reports of detriment were indicated in 4.3% of cases, up from 3.1% in 2020/21.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark commented: *"I am greatly concerned by the increase in reported detriment for speaking up, which had been reducing. When someone speaks up, it should be considered a gift – a gift of information which could prevent harm or lead to improvement. I expect leaders to role model this behaviour in their organisations, and send a clear message that treating people badly for speaking up will not be tolerated."*

The National Guardian's Office Annual Report 2021-22 is available to download from www.nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

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