

National Guardian fears for safety of patients if NHS workers' concerns are not addressed

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Press release

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“The NHS may be broken, but by listening to our people, we can begin to fix it,” says Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark

The National Guardian's Office today (24 July 2024) published its [analysis of the questions relating to speaking up in the 2023 NHS Staff Survey](#).

The analysis of the 2023 NHS Staff Survey by the National Guardian's Office reveals a decline in workers feeling secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice for the second consecutive year.

While workers' confidence in speaking up about anything which concerns them showed signs of improvement, the survey revealed a five-year low in the number of respondents who feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice.

The confidence of medical professionals to raise clinical safety concerns has declined by around six percentage points since 2021 (69.4% in 2023 compared to 75.1% in 2021). This is declining for medics at all stages of their career (both those in training and consultants).

The Freedom to Speak Up sub-score, which measures NHS workers' confidence in speaking up, remained stable this year at 6.46, a slight improvement from 2022 (6.44). The sub-score is comprised of two sets of questions relating to raising and addressing concerns about unsafe clinical practice (questions 20a and 20b) and anything of concern (questions 25e and 25f).

While the results have improved since the 2015 Freedom to Speak Up Review and resulting actions, this data continues the fall in NHS workers' confidence to speak up since the pandemic. However, Freedom to Speak Up guardians are seeing an increase in the numbers of cases being raised with them, which may signify that other speaking up routes are not effective or trusted.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS said: *“This deterioration in confidence has implications for patient safety. These figures must focus the minds of those who lead healthcare organisations. If your people feel they cannot speak up about matters affecting patient care, or if they do, nothing will happen, how can you be assured that you are delivering your best for patients?”*

“When workers have a good experience when they speak up, they share that experience and we will begin to change the conversation of what it means to speak up in healthcare. The NHS may be broken, but by listening to our people, we can begin to fix it.”

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

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