

## NHS England and NHS Improvement Board meetings held in common

**Paper Title:** Staff Health and Wellbeing

**Agenda item:** 6 (Public session)

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**Paper type:** For review

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### Organisation Objective:

NHS Mandate from Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Statutory item	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Long Term Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governance	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS People Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

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### Action required:

The Boards are invited to:

- Note (i) the progress already achieved and impact of strengthening support to staff and (ii) the plans for assuring delivery of significant additional support over winter
- Be assured of the delivery of mental health and wellbeing hubs and an enhanced occupational health and wellbeing offer during the winter, commissioned with input from regional colleagues
- Note other important programmes of work that run alongside the comprehensive support offer that is in place for staff, such as violence reduction and support to line managers in preventive action to support staff
- Note the risks and opportunities for the staff health and wellbeing programme, particularly beyond 2020/21 and the funding that has been secured for this year

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### Executive summary:

A comprehensive health and wellbeing (H&WB) offer for NHS staff was developed within 3 weeks of the start of the Pandemic. Rapid iteration has helped support staff during Covid, with key actions having been set out in the People Plan 2020/21 published in July. There have been **over 500,000 contacts with the programme resources to date**. Inbuilt evaluation ensures continuous improvement and swift response to need. Normalising help-seeking behaviour amongst our NHS people is a continued objective.

Mental health and wellbeing hubs, providing proactive outreach and assessment services, and giving staff rapid access to specialist mental health support for staff who need it are being put in place across all systems during the winter, alongside enhanced occupational health and wellbeing across 14 systems. All of this will be underpinned by a greater focus on supporting line managers and effective communication to ensure staff are aware of what is available and how to access it.

Ongoing focus and funding are required to ensure that support for staff continues beyond the duration of the Covid pandemic which will lead to an increased need for mental health and wellbeing support for some time to come.

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## Background

1. At the beginning of the Covid pandemic, it was clear that there was an urgent need to strengthen the health and wellbeing support to staff to take account of the demands being placed on them, both in terms of the intensity of the work for some staff and the uncertainty, stress and anxiety for the whole workforce.
2. There is evidence to suggest that healthcare staff are often hesitant to seek help and concerned about confidentiality when doing so. There is a positive correlation between staff HWB and patient quality of care. Additionally, research shows that poorer well-being and higher burnout are associated with poorer quality and safety of patient care, higher absenteeism, and higher turnover rates.<sup>1</sup>
3. As a key workstream within the People Directorate's Workforce Cell, the national H&WB programme sought to augment support available to staff locally. Many organisations responded swiftly with enhanced local H&WB services and a stocktake revealed where the national programme could ensure a consistent offer for all our NHS people.
4. The national H&WB programme is designed to provide an end to end pathway approach; a spectrum of self-care and primary prevention through to mental health assessment and treatment. Drawing on the advice and experience of a swiftly convened Expert Advisory Group comprising experts with relevant experience in, for example, the Ebola crisis, Manchester bombings, and military responses, an evidence-based approach was taken within a trauma-based framework:
  - **Prepare** - Helping people cope for themselves and building in line-management and team support to do so. This recognises that investing in prevention, briefing and preparation will lead to more positive outcomes.
  - **Active** – When staff are in the 'eye of the storm' and the demands can seem overwhelming there is little 'head space' for them to attend to their own wellbeing as well as to provide the care needed for patients and their families.
  - **Recover** – It is likely that for many staff psychological difficulties will present after the most intensive phase is over, as people reflect on events and replay them. It is important to differentiate between a normal and healthy reaction to abnormal events and excessive stress and more serious ongoing concerns which may require specialist support.

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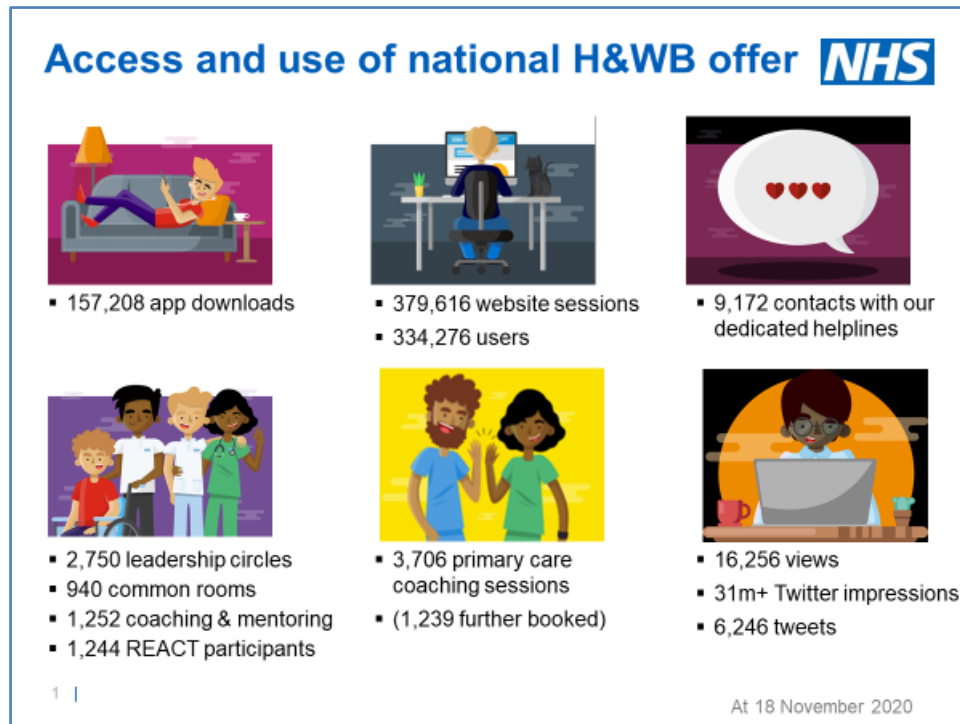
<sup>1</sup> [Mental healthcare staff well-being and burnout, Int. Journal of Mental Health Nursing \(2017\)](#)

5. The role of the line manager is crucial. Therefore, as well as self-serve offers of support to staff, there has also been a strong focus on supporting and providing information to line managers to be equipped to fulfil their role in supporting their teams.
6. The NHS People Plan 2020/21 was published in July, with a strong emphasis on 'Looking after our People' – including 23 commitments related to health and wellbeing – and 'Belonging in the NHS' with a focus on addressing inequalities within the NHS workforce. The strengthening of the H&WB support to NHS staff described in this paper is aligned with the commitments set out in the People Plan. The People Plan itself supports delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan by ensuring that we have more people (both new and by retaining our current people), working differently (more productively, using their full range of skills, enabled by technology) and in a more compassionate, inclusive culture.

### Action taken so far and the impact and learning

7. During the early months of the outbreak, a comprehensive online platform was rapidly developed and made available to staff through [www.people.nhs.uk](http://www.people.nhs.uk). Key elements of the offer include:
  - Free use of several market-leading apps to improve health and wellbeing to NHS staff (e.g., Headspace, Unmind, Sleepio)
  - Dedicated, confidential staff telephone helpline, in partnership with The Samaritans, and a 24 hour text service
  - Structured debrief and support mechanisms, such as leadership circles, and REACT (Recognise, Engage, Actively listen, Check risk, and Talk)
  - Support packages aimed at staff and line managers including virtual Common Rooms and a range of online resources, guides and training
  - Free coaching, mentoring and support to staff, including a specific offer to primary care
  - A support package for executive leadership in conjunction with the Academy of Leadership and Lifelong Learning
  - The development of a tailored offer for BAME staff, recognising the disproportionate impact of Covid on people from diverse backgrounds
  - A series of wellbeing webinars for those working to support NHS and care staff health and wellbeing
8. Ongoing evaluation ensures continuous improvement and swift response to need. For example, the development of a culturally competent Tagalog bereavement service in partnership with Hospice UK for our Philippine colleagues.
9. Figure 1 (below) shows the take up rate of the national health and wellbeing offer up until 11 November.

Figure 1



10. The H&WB Expert Advisory Group has helped ensure that the content of the packages available to staff are evidence-based and responsive to emerging evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 response on the wellbeing of NHS staff.
11. The evaluation of health and wellbeing support has provided evidence that a significant number of staff are accessing it and that the programme is helping staff through access to self-help; supporting resilience and reflection; supporting leaders and managers; helping staff to support colleagues.  
**Feedback from those staff accessing offers has been highly positive, with satisfaction ratings routinely recorded over 90%.** Personnel Today awarded NHSEI the [Best Wellbeing initiative](#) in 2020 for the response to Covid.
12. Representative quotes from staff in appreciation of the H&WB support include;
  - *“I faced some really tough consequences during Covid. I was an emotional wreck. Using the Headspace app really helped me to not completely lose myself. Give it a try; it could change your life!”*
  - *“I very much appreciate the help and support you have given me. I struggle to ask for help but it was reassuring to hear that what I feel is ok. I felt safe. Thank you”*
  - *“At the time of my text I was in turmoil with anxiety and feeling like a failure. I’m normally resilient and always the person to help [others] if they are struggling. Admitting that I was struggling is really hard but the volunteer texted back that it was ok to feel how I was and was really positive. Having someone acknowledge how hard working on the frontline has been made me feel reassured that I wasn’t failing at*

*my job or in life generally. Thank you so much for your help.”*

13. Thematic evaluation analysis revealed a range of secondary stressors impacting H&WB, such as financial concerns, concerns about family and relationships. Barriers to accessing the offer (such as effective and supportive line managers, visible leadership, time and space to access support, clarity on the types of support available) have informed our renewed communications campaign whilst also including the mental health treatment additions to the programme detailed below.

### Strengthening the support available to staff this winter

14. The circumstances going into the second wave of the pandemic are different to the peak of the first wave, with the cumulative impact of a prolonged period of stress now being a key factor, and the combined pressure of delivering services through winter.
15. Within the People Directorate Workforce Cell, the H&WB programme has worked jointly with the Mental Health Team to enhance the support offer. During the winter we are implementing two major programmes of work described in the People Plan, with a combined investment in 2020/21 of £30m;
  - **Staff Mental Health Support**
    - i. **Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs** to provide proactive outreach and assessment services to all staff, giving staff rapid access to mental health support. The Mental Health Team (with Claire Murdoch as SRO) is working closely with regions to build on initial investment and have all systems begin establishing hubs by December.
    - ii. A nationally commissioned **complex case service** is also being established to support staff who have been assessed by the hubs as having additional mental health treatment needs (e.g., complex addictions and co-occurring mental health problems).
    - iii. the Nursing Directorate is leading on procurement of **psychological and mental wellbeing training** for critical care nursing staff to be delivered over the Winter.
  - **Enhanced occupational health and wellbeing** support across 14 health systems prioritised by regional teams, which collectively cover 700,000 NHS staff. In many cases this support will also extend to other health and care staff, such as colleagues in social care. The priorities in each system have been set locally to make the greatest difference to staff, and the programme will be evaluated both at system level and nationally to assure the impact and maximise the learning. One of the goals of this programme is to test and refine what it will take to develop and embed a proactive culture of wellbeing, rather than H&WB being seen as a specialist activity.
16. Figure 2 shows how mental H&WB hubs and the enhanced occupational health offer build on what is already in place to create a tiered pyramid of support from preventive care to specialist support. Staff access the first tier of support themselves, local specialist help is available through occupational

health and specialist support is accessed via the regional mental health hubs.

Figure 2



17. Further developments include:

- **Extending free access to health and wellbeing apps to NHS staff** until the end March 2021, funded nationally
- **Development of an accessible physical health offer** in partnership with Invictus Games Foundation
- **Financial wellbeing support** in partnership with the Money and Pensions Service ([MAPS](#))
- **Violence reduction training** and extending the pilot of body-worn cameras in the ambulance sector
- **Implementing H&WB conversations for all NHS staff**, including new joiners as detailed in the People Plan 20/21
- **Introducing 'Leadership lifeguards'** to provide coaching and support to line managers
- **Further development and research into the offer to BAME staff** and networks, including working in partnership with faith groups
- **Family and relationship support** in partnership with specialist providers
- **Continued partnership working** across NHS England and Improvement People Directorate, Mental Health Team, and Regional Team colleagues

### Risks and opportunities

18. During the winter the NHS will need to balance effective workforce planning and deployment (i.e., ensuring that the staff needed to meet patient demand



are available as needs change) with the need to maintain focus on staff H&WB. Wellbeing Guardians are being introduced in every NHS employer during the winter to ensure this happens within Trusts and PCNs.

19. Clear and consistent communication is paramount, to make sure that staff are aware of the support available and feel well supported. Staff are being encouraged to seek help if they need it through national communications. This can be supported by a shift in the public narrative to reinforce that our NHS people are normal people doing extraordinary work rather than 'heroes' as this label can create a feeling that individuals should be able to cope, rather than seeking help.
20. A significant opportunity over the coming winter is to establish the primary importance of 'looking after our people' as a cultural norm. This requires visible role modelling, a strong narrative as to why this matters, the support and training to help line managers and teams and clear governance and a focus on measurable outcomes including sickness absence, staff retention and staff engagement and experience. These aspects align with the purpose, scope and expected outcomes of the enhanced occupational health and wellbeing programme.
21. There will need to be an ongoing focus on and funding for staff health and wellbeing, given that the evidence suggests that the impact of this period of extended demands on staff is likely to last for between 2 and 7 years for some staff. Therefore, provision will need to be made for ongoing funding beyond 2020/21 to avoid a situation where the additional support that has been put in place, such as mental health and wellbeing hubs staffed by clinicians, cannot be sustained beyond this financial year. Instead, it should become a sustainable part of the support we provide for our staff.
22. In conclusion, the Covid pandemic has placed a renewed focus on the need to look after our people. In response, comprehensive support has been put in place to support all aspects of staff health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on psychological support through the mental health hubs. This period has also driven innovation and learning, which will continue beyond the Covid pandemic and move the NHS forwards in fulfilling the People Promise.