

Requirements for Patient Safety Specialists

Who are patient safety specialists?

The requirement for every NHS organisation to have one or more [Patient Safety Specialist](#) is identified in the NHS standard contract.

Patient Safety Specialists (PSSs) are the key patient safety experts in healthcare organisations. If more than one PSS is in post, they will work together as a team to ensure all the requirements of the role are met.

They are 'captains of the team' and provide dynamic, senior leadership, visibility and expert support to the patient safety work in their organisations.

What do patient safety specialists do?

PSSs lead and support the local implementation of the NHS Patient Safety Strategy.

PSSs lead, and may directly support, patient safety 'insight', 'involvement' and 'improvement' activity and ensure that systems thinking, human factors understanding and just culture principles are embedded in all patient safety processes. They promote patient safety thinking beyond why things go wrong in healthcare (Safety I), to examining why things routinely go right and how that can be maximised (Safety II).

PSSs will support other workforce leads in the organisation in ensuring that all staff are trained in Level 1 of the [NHS patient safety syllabus](#).

On occasions the PSS will be asked by the NHS England National Patient Safety Team to raise local awareness of an urgent national safety concern or help them in understanding a local issue that has been reported or identified.

PSSs work closely and collaboratively with those within their organisation who have specific patient safety responsibilities, including at operational level. They support an aligned approach to the improvement of safety through these roles and avoid duplication of effort.

PSSs are involved in PSS networks at system, regional and national level which provide the opportunity to discuss common issues, risks and challenges and support an integrated and



standardised approach to improving safety. They are also an opportunity to share good practice and learn from each other.

Provider-level PSSs support ICB PSSs and Region PSSs in system related safety issues as required and vice versa.

How are patient safety specialists supported to fulfil their role?

Each healthcare organisation should have a minimum of one full whole-time equivalent PSS working in accordance with these role requirements.

Organisations can identify multiple people to work as PSS part time in the role, potentially alongside other roles, and to support flexible working, which can then add up to a whole-time equivalent or more. However, given that the PSS role includes the requirement to respond to urgent safety concerns, organisations must ensure this responsibility is covered by a PSS during normal working hours (9-5, Mon-Fri) even if this is a different individual at different times.

Where a PSS is unavailable due to leave, sickness, or where variations in working hours mean no PSS is available during normal working hours, cover arrangements should be made. The key principle here is that each organisation has a minimum of 37.5 hours a week of PSS time and that during normal working hours there is a route for rapid response to emerging safety challenges.

All PSSs must have time for the role built into their job description. Where there are multiple PSSs they will work closely together to deliver the identified requirements of the role.

All PSSs should be fully trained in the [NHS patient safety syllabus](#) (the current requirement is levels 1-4) and be provided with sufficient time and resources within their working time to do this. They should have had previous experience working in patient safety.

PSSs have access to a variety of resources available on the [FutureNHS patient safety](#) and [PSS's platforms](#) to support them in the implementation of the NHS patient safety strategy.

Board and leadership responsibilities in relation to Patient Safety Specialists

NHS boards, or equivalents, and organisational leaders are responsible for supporting PSSs to fulfil their role. They are responsible for identifying the right people to be PSSs. They must ensure the number of whole-time equivalents of PSSs in post is proportionate to the size and complexity of their organisation.

Once agreed, the PSS's name(s) should be provided to NHS England by the executive lead for patient safety. This is also the case when successor/additional PSSs are identified.

They should be supported to use the job title of patient safety specialist, which may be in addition to existing job titles (eg 'Head of Patient Safety and Patient Safety Specialist' or similar).

The PSS(s) should have immediate and direct access to an executive lead for patient safety who they regularly meet with. They should be given the authority to make decisions and influence as appropriate within established operational structures.

The PSS(s) should work with the executive lead for patient safety in reviewing the NHS patient safety strategy, how it relates to local patient safety priorities and agree an appropriate approach to implementation/delivery.

PSSs will attend board meetings as required to be involved in discussions relating to patient safety. They will be a member of the board sub-committee with responsibility for patient safety.

The PSS should be involved in delivering the Level 1 patient safety syllabus training to the board. Additional resources are being developed to support this.

PSSs have a key role in supporting the executive team to understand the most effective approaches to improving patient safety and ensuring that any patient safety-related responsibilities held by different executives are effectively aligned.

The PSSs should work closely with the non-executive director who leads on patient safety.