

**Guardian Service Report
TWELVE MONTH REPORT 1 APRIL 2020 to 31 MARCH 2021**

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to share the continued progress, development and evaluation of the service and recommendations from the Raising Concern Guardians. It is important this paper is considered in light of the Covid-19 pandemic; its impact over the last 12 months and the decision to offer a 6-month extension before re-issuing the original pilot contract for 12 months (ending November 2021). This decision had been made in order to continue to provide an additional avenue to support staff during the most challenging of times. The Guardian Service is very grateful to Claire Burke for agreeing to stay on for an additional 3 months past her retirement date due to Covid-19 pandemic. Claire Burke retired at the end of July 2020 and the Guardian Service continued to provide a full-time service through Malcolm Stammers. Dafydd Owen has since been appointed to replace Claire Burke and now offers a bilingual option for contacts to be supported in Welsh.

Promotion/Communication Visits

The Raising Concern Guardians ceased conducting promotional visits onsite and followed Government guidelines to work from home throughout the period of the report. There has been limited promotion of the service to staff up until recently, in order not to impact staff capacity and recognising the pressure on services. Virtual drop-in sessions have been arranged via MS Teams during March and April 2021 to replace the onsite promotional visits along with the offer of virtual presentations for teams and departments. There have been **5 virtual drop-in sessions** during the period of this report with **9 more scheduled for April 2021** to trial how they are received and so far every session (including those running on evenings and weekends) has seen staff call in to find out more. (From those 5 sessions there have been 7 contacts/engagements with staff). It is therefore planned, that on-line drop-in sessions will continue to be arranged for the remainder of the contract.

When the situation and services stabilise, a revived program of promotion will be coordinated, however from staff feedback, it is felt it would be beneficial to have a combined programme available. The provision of both onsite and virtually run sessions would enable an offer of availability on different days and times, providing as broad an offer as possible.

A total of **43** communications/promotional visits have been held during the year.

Number of concerns raised

There have been **66** (91 last year) concerns raised by staff during the period of this report.

Contact has been made from staff to the Raising Concerns Guardians via email (**1441**), telephone (**471**) and face to face visits (**283**). In 2019 the figures were 906, 1493 and 152 respectively. Great use has been made of various online services e.g. Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom to be able to engage on a face-to-face basis as best possible.

The Raising Concerns Guardians encourage face-to-face meetings online but follow ups may be by telephone or email. The quality of engagement has been affected by not being able to meet contacts face-to-face and a return to sites at the earliest safe opportunity will be warmly welcomed. Unsurprisingly, this has also been the view expressed by many of the contacts.

Themes

The concerns raised are broken down into the following themes:

Themes	No. of concerns raised		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Patient safety	0	6	0%	7%
Management Concern	30	31	45%	22%
System and Process	3	12	5%	20%
Bullying and Harassment	10	17	15%	29%
Discrimination and Inequality	4	2	6%	5%
Behavioral / Relationship	13	18	20%	12%
Other	6	10	9%	5%
TOTAL	66	96	100%	100%

The System and Process concerns relate to job roles (2) and service delivery (1). The “other” theme relates to concerns raised from staff that do not fall within the above categories, i.e. Covid-19, awaiting referral and requests for information. It should be noted that often the concerns raised could be reflected in more than one theme, but a decision has to be made as to the most appropriate. **Whenever a contact is made, we always advise staff to make contact with their Trade Unions to ensure that staff are aware of all the options available to them. To re-confirm, The Guardian Service does not intervene in formal Employee Relations Cases, however, it is important to share feedback received in listening to staff as part of initial scoping of a concern.**

The outcome of the bullying and harassment concerns raised that are **closed**:

Outcome of bullying and harassment concerns raised	Number		Percentage	
	12 months	Previous 12 months	12 months	Previous 12 months
Informally resolved with Guardian support	3	3	43%	25%
Decided not to take forward	4	3	57%	50%
Resignation		1	0%	25 %
TOTAL	7	7	100%	100%

The contacts follow a similar pattern to last year and again it was possible to help staff avoid engaging in a formal process, by empowering them to raise the issue themselves, while the service provided ongoing support.

Staff Groups

Detailed below are the staff groups who have raised concerns. The staff group is defined by the NHS.

Staff Groups	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Additional Clinical Services	8	11	12%	5%
Additional Professional Services	1		1.5%	
Administrative and Clerical	15	35	23%	39%
Allied Health Professional	9	8	14%	7%
Medical and Dental	2	5	3%	7%
Nursing and Midwifery Registered	28	23	42%	15%
Estates and Ancillary	0	1	0	2.5%
Healthcare Scientists	0	2	0	2.5%
Role not confirmed	3	11	4.5%	22%
TOTAL	66	96	100%	100%

There are some interesting elements to these figures in that there was a marked reduction in contacts from the Administrative and Clerical area which may well reflect the number of staff working from home while those from Nursing and Midwifery increased again unsurprising being those mainly “on the front line”. Also during the period of this report we had our first contact from a trainee and volunteer.

Patient safety

While there have been no direct patient safety issues raised for the period of the report, one of the contacts from the previous year remains open. An action plan had been developed, but as a result of the pandemic it had to be “put on hold” but as core services and business resumes, it will be a focus to ensure things get back on track.

The reason why staff use the Guardian Service

Reason	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Fear of damage to career	5	20	7.5%	32%
Fear of losing job	0	3	0%	7%
Fear of reprisal	5	12	7.5%	29%
Believe they will not be listened to	29	24	44%	10%
Believe the organization will not take action	21	24	32%	17%
Have raised the concern before but have not been listened to / nothing has been done	6	11	9%	5%
TOTALS	66	94	100%	100%

There has been a marked increase in staff believing that they will not be listened to and the other category believing the organization will not act remains high. However, it should be noted that there has been a sizeable reduction in the category of fearing damage to their career, which may or may not be linked to the reduction in administrative and clerical contacts.

Cases by Directorates

The table below shows the number of concerns raised per directorate.

Directorate	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Morrison Delivery Unit	25	35	38%	24%
Singleton Delivery Unit	11	13	17%	24%
Neath Port Talbot Delivery Unit	5	19	7.5%	20%
Primary & Community Services Delivery Unit	8	9	12%	5%
Mental Health & Learning Disabilities	13	7	20%	6.5%
Informatics	1	1	1.5%	1%
Director of Strategy	1		1.5%	

HQ	0	5		12%
Cimla	0	1		1%
Not confirmed	2	6	3%	15%
TOTALS	66	96	100%	100%

It should be noted that there has been a marked rise in concerns from the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Directorate. A reduction in contacts in HQ may be as a result of “home working”, both of which are areas to monitor going forward.

Action taken to improve speak up culture

Action taken to address themes

- In some instances, staff contact the Raising Concerns Guardian because formal processes are taking too long, although it has been noted that there has been a reduction in this sort of contact since other measures to improve formal processes were put in place by the Health Board. The Raising Concerns Guardian can explain to a contact; the complexities and time constraints that may arise during a formal investigation to support them make a decision around the course of action they would like to take, however is unable to engage until after the case has been closed if this is the route they have decided to take or have already taken.
- The Raising Concerns Guardians supports staff by offering information on the options available to them in taking forward their concern, offering safe, independent listening without judgement, highlighting the benefit of facilitated meetings. We always suggest that if members of a Trade Union they should contact the applicable Trade Union thereby ensuring that they have explored all the options open to them before deciding what (if any) action they propose to take.
- A benefit reported by the Raising Concerns Guardians where cases have been closed, is that they have enabled and empowered the contact to raise and take forward their concerns themselves by ensuring they have as much information as possible as to their options without engaging in a formal process.

Communication and escalation

- It has not been possible for the Raising Concerns Guardians to attend meetings and events including the monthly staff inductions to brief staff about the service although recently a virtual induction has been provided which encourages staff to be aware of and use the service. The access/contact details to the Guardian Service are available on posters displayed across all sites, all the Health Board’s online systems with several referrals coming from the Health Board’s Wellbeing Service. However, once the Service is able to return to site then an

audit of posters etc will be required due to the many changes on sites over the period of the pandemic.

- The Raising Concerns Guardians become empathetic listeners when a staff member wishes to offload. However, as per our mandate we do not become involved in any internal disciplinary or grievance process. Staff are informed of our position at the outset as well as advised that in order to decide, they should consider all options including speaking with their Trade Union if applicable. However, Raising Concerns Guardians are available to listen in these situations and thereby promote the Speaking Up culture.
- Monthly meetings are held with the Director of Workforce & Organisational Development to talk through the monthly activity reports, which includes themes and outcome of cases. No individual can be identified by the report, therefore keeping staff members' confidentiality, which is essential and a contractual obligation. Eight-weekly meetings have been held with the Chair of the Health Board and her commitment to the Service is clear.
- Throughout the pandemic there have been regular virtual meetings with our Health Board operational leads, Julie Lloyd and Kay Myatt. These meetings are currently held on a 3-week cycle to ensure that any issues are discussed/resolved.
- At the start of the year there were large number of "open" cases which have been discussed at the above meetings as to what actions can be undertaken to help resolve them which has been the case over this period. **It is important to note that there will be a slight delay in closing some of these cases due to the current Covid-19 situation, as staff have been redeployed to other duties but there will be a clear focus in this area when the situation allows and is appropriate.**
- Where an issue is agreed for escalation, the system is used as follows:

Red	These scenarios require immediate escalation and response within 12 hours
Amber	A response is required within 48 hours
Green	A response is required with 72 hours

Learning and Improvement

- The Raising Concerns Guardians attend fortnightly (increased activity since the start of the pandemic) Guardian Service meetings where difficult concerns raised are discussed, peer support and learning gained, and good practice shared. Again, confidentiality is always held, and no individual is identified.

- As the Guardian Service has clients across a number of English NHS Trusts, we are in a position to compare and contrast best practice approaches (while acknowledging the difference approaches in the Home Countries) in respect to policy, service implementation and organisational response. This enabled at the height of the pandemic, a report on COVID-19 issues from all Trusts using the Guardian Service to be circulated as well as other promotional ideas/videos to be shared where applicable.
- During the period of this report the Guardians have undertaken the Mental Health First Aid training programme to further enhance their skills.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the original plans that we had agreed to work jointly on and to develop and evaluate the impact of the Service. Where applicable they have been updated and included along with new ones that we feel are appropriate.

- While the commitment of the Board and Executive team at Swansea Bay University Health Board to the Guardian Service has been excellent, consideration should be given to publicising personal commitments from each member with regard to “raising concerns” in order to further cement to staff that the Board/Executive team are committed to the All Wales Procedure for Staff Raising Concerns.
- A continued focus on reducing the number of “open” cases will remain although much progress has been made this year in reducing the number.
- The issue of staff turnover is common theme from staff and there needs to be a concerted effort to publicise to staff the considerable extent of the efforts being undertaken to recruit new staff while ensuring that the programmes to retain and value existing staff continue. There is no doubt that the pandemic has also meant that many staff have revaluated their lives, which will have an impact on retirements etc. the perception is that the Executive Team are doing little to recruit new staff, which we know is not the case, so there is still work to do around communication.
- There has been some feedback on the lack of a consistent policy with regard to exit interviews. On a number of occasions when staff have made the decision to leave the Health Board, they have wanted to undertake an exit interview to give the organisation the opportunity to review any appropriate actions that might be applicable but this has unfortunately not happened. Whenever this has been requested on behalf of a staff member it is has been facilitated by HR, but there could be good learning opportunities being missed.

- Staff continue to report that the length of time taken for grievances to be heard is too long and exceeds the policy. Steps have been made to improve this and there is some evidence of positive impact, but it is essentially important that regular communication with staff to keep them updated is undertaken. This will also help encourage staff to raise any further concerns.
- A continued programme of communication and engagement sessions is required to promote the Guardian Service to all staff groups wherever they are located, as there are still areas that are not aware of the service despite the comprehensive plan undertaken so far. **This will be even more important as the Health Board works to recover from Covid-19.**
- There has been much work on “Living our Values” but there are clearly areas where the philosophy is not yet embedded, which causes issues when there is conflict between staff. This is shown in the considerable increase in “behavioural responsibility” concerns, however real progress has been made, especially with new staff, but there is still much to do particularly regarding more established staff. Contacts often tell us that they have been promoted to positions with little or no experience of or training to equip them for managing staff. There have been instances where staff have intimated that they would rather take sick leave than speak up, as they believe they will not be listened to or that the Health Board will take no action. There clearly is still a lot of work to be done to allow staff to feel they can trust the organisation and the Guardians are happy to work with the continuing initiatives that the Board have undertaken as well as assist in developing any new ones.
- In last year’s report it was noted that there had been a good level of engagement from HR at certain sites and it is good to report that this has been forthcoming from all areas this year – long may it continue. Our specific thanks should be noted to Kathryn Jones, Kay Myatt and our direct liaison, Julie Lloyd who have always been prepared to assist whenever we have contacted them, which has made our work so much easier.
- The Guardian Service remains very keen to develop a working relationship with the Trade Unions and will support any measures that senior management feel appropriate as this would have a positive impact on staff and patient experience.
- It is advised that these recommendations are used to formulate an action plan from these recommendations that would be discussed monthly along with the monthly reports to ensure actions are taken and progressed.