

Guardian Service Report May 2019 to April 2020

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to provide an end of year report at the end of the 1-year pilot of an independent raising concerns service for Swansea Bay University Health Board. It is also to provide recommendations from the themes arising from the contacts received by the Raising Concerns Guardians in the first year of operation.

Promotion/Communication Visits

The comprehensive high-level communication plan has continued to be implemented throughout the year with the full support of the Staff Experience & Organisational Development Team. This included presenting at the regular monthly staff inductions including those for Junior Doctors, through Guardian presentations to staff groups at team meetings, awareness sessions and stands at various sites across the health board and use of corporate-wide communication channels.

However, there were some areas that were “hard to reach” such as Estates and Mental Health and just prior to Covid-19 a supplementary plan was being developed to try and ensure that those areas of the Health Board were visited. With the majority of contacts using direct phone or email; the value of the both drop-in awareness stands and formally arranged information session has been highlighted.

A total of 115 (76 at six months) promotional visits have been held as at 30th April 2020, although the last face-to-face visit was on 13th March 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation.

In adapting to new ways of working in light of COVID-19, there are plans in place for promotion and communication of the Service to take place via virtual and remote means and the service has continued to operate in this way for contacts needing support throughout the pandemic so far and has been promoted along with the range of wellbeing support that has been offered to Swansea Bay staff during this time of adversity.

Number of concerns raised

There have been **96** (41 at six months) concerns raised by staff from 13th May 2019 to 30th April 2020.

Contact has been made from staff to the Raising Concerns Guardians via **email - 906** (201 at six months), **telephone - 493** (171 at six months) and **face to face visits - 152** (51 at six months).

The Raising Concerns Guardians encourage face-to-face meetings, but follow ups may be by telephone or email as appropriate.

Since the Covid-19 situation, engagement has continued via telephone, email, and other online methods such as Zoom, Skype and Facetime depending on the contact's preferred method.

Themes

The concerns raised are broken down into the following themes:

Themes	No. of concerns raised		Percentage	
	12 months	6 months	12 months	6 months
Patient safety	6	3	7%	4%
Management Concern	31	9	22%	33%
System and Process	12	8	20%	13%
Bullying and Harassment	17	12	29%	18%
Discrimination and Inequality	2	2	5%	2%
Behavioural / Relationship	18	5	12%	19%
Other	10	2	5%	11%
TOTAL	96	41	100%	100%

The System and Process concerns relate to grievance / disciplinary process (4), job roles (2), contractual salary issues (2), ward access and service delivery (3). 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. **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	6 months	12 months	6 months
Informally resolved with Guardian support	3	1	25%	43%
Decided not to take forward	3	2	50%	43%
Resignation	1	1	25%	14 %
TOTAL	7	4	100%	100%

The increase in contacts that were resolved should be noted. Rather than engage in a formal process, it was possible through empowering for the member of staff 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	
	12 months	6 months	12 months	6 months
Additional Clinical Services	11	2	5%	12%
Administrative and Clerical	35	16	39%	37%
Allied Health Professional	8	3	7%	7%
Medical and Dental	5	3	7%	5%
Nursing and Midwifery Registered	23	6	15%	24%
Estates and Ancillary	1	1	2.5%	1%
Healthcare Scientists	2	1	2.5%	2%
Role not confirmed	11	9	22%	12%
TOTAL	96	41	100%	100%

The data largely remains the same as at 6 months apart from Additional Clinical Services and Nursing and Midwifery Registered which shows a considerable percentage increase.

Patient safety

There have been 6 patient safety issues. Two cases are still open. Two were regarding staff shortages, where for one it was agreed that better communication to staff via a variety of means would help reduce the perception or concern that nothing is happening, while the other resulted in the contact resigning. The latter issue has resulted in an action plan being developed and various meetings are being held to ensure implementation.

The reason why staff use the Guardian Service

Reason	Number		Percentage	
	12 months	6 months	12 months	6 months
Fear of damage to career	20	13	32%	21%
Fear of losing job	3	3	7%	3%
Fear of reprisal	12	12	29%	13%
Believe they will not be listened to	24	4	10%	25.5%
Believe the organization will not take action	24	7	17%	25.5%

Have raised the concern before but have not been listed to / nothing has been done	11	2	5%	12%
TOTALS	94	41	100%	100%

The data indicates that only 94 of the 96 contacts gave a reason for using the Guardian Service, as one member of staff was requesting information and another has yet to confirm why they contacted the service.

There has been a marked increase in two of the categories where staff believe they will not be listened to and believe the organization will not take action.

Cases by Directorates

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

Directorate	Number		Percentage	
	12 months	6 months	12 months	6 months
Morrison Delivery Unit	35	10	24%	36%
Singleton Delivery Unit	13	10	24%	13%
Neath Port Talbot Delivery Unit	19	8	20%	19%
Primary & Community Services Delivery Unit	9	2	5%	8.5%
Mental Health & Learning Disabilities	7			6.5%
Informatics	1			1%
HQ	5	5	12%	5%
Cimla	1			1%
Not confirmed	6	6	15%	6%
TOTALS	96	41	100%	100%

There has been a marked increase of concerns raised at Morrison Delivery Unit from the initial six months. This data shows the impact of the communications plan with concerns raised from Mental Health and Learning Disabilities directorate after briefing staff at team meetings, arranged as a result of identified gaps in communication across the Unit.

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 is able to 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 as well checking/confirming if they are members of any applicable Trade Union and has sign posted staff to their unions if they are members and this is appropriate to the contact and the reason for the concern they are raising.
- 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

- The Raising Concerns Guardians attend meetings and events including the monthly staff inductions to brief staff about the service. This encourages staff to be aware of and use the service. This has included briefings on a number of occasions to junior doctors which is welcomed. The access/contact details to the Guardian Service are available on posters displayed across all sites, all the Health Board's online systems with a number of referrals coming from the Health Board's Wellbeing Service.
- 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 make a decision, 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.
- There are large number of "open" cases which have been discussed at the above meetings as to what actions can be undertaken to help resolve them. It

is important to note that there will be a slight delay in closing 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 monthly Guardian Service meetings where difficult concerns raised are discussed, peer support and learning gained and good practice shared. Again, confidentiality is held at all times as cases are only referred to by their number so 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 has enabled 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.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 situation has meant that some of the previous recommendations mentioned in the six monthly report along with plans to develop the Service have been affected and so they are repeated here where applicable.

- 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 “Raising Concerns” Policy. As discussed in recent meetings, the number of “open” cases is a concern with efforts needing to be made to resolve them.
- 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. With regard to recruiting new staff, the

perception is that the Executive Team are doing little, which we know is not the case.

- 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.
- Staff are reporting 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 with reasons for delay 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 as yet not embedded, which causes issues when there is conflict between staff. This is shown in the considerable increase in “behavioural responsibility” concerns from the first six months. Real progress has been made, especially with new staff, but there is still much to do particularly with regard to 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. Staff would rather take sick leave than speak up, as they believe they will not be listened to or that the Health Board will take action.
- There has been a good level of engagement from HR at certain sites and it would be hoped that this can be further extended to all sites. This would further support all staff to be able to access the Service, as well as enable better interaction with HR staff.
- There has been a lack of engagement, and in some instances opposition from some of the Trade Unions which has reduced the opportunity for partnership working and the sharing of data. This would support measure the impact of the service and prevent duplication/cross working. It is recommended that there is greater partnership working for the benefit of both staff and patients going forward.