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OPINION

Helene Donnelly: 'Every trust should appoint an ambassador for cultural change'

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We need an NHS that truly encourages and supports its staff in raising concerns, says Helene Donnelly

Following my experiences at Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust and giving evidence at both Francis inquiries, I have been trying to raise the importance of nurses speaking out and raising concerns about care. I know full well how daunting and frightening this can be for a variety of reasons, which is why culture needs to change.

Through my role as ambassador for cultural change for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust, I hope first to raise awareness about what raising concerns really means, and how it affects us in practice. I am helping to educate and support all trust staff and therefore encouraging them to raise any concerns they have. I want to hear from all staff, not just nurses, if they think things are not right.

"I believe all raising concerns policies should be standardised nationally"

I am looking at the trust's raising concerns policy to see if it includes all that it should. Perhaps more importantly, I am helping to make the process of

raising concerns more user friendly for staff, so that this in itself does not put people off.

I believe all raising concerns policies should be standardised nationally, so all NHS staff know what to expect, irrespective of where they work. I would like to see training on how to raise concerns to become part of mandatory and statutory training updates for all staff. Inductions for all staff need to include sessions on raising concerns, and I am happy to say that Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is doing this.

I am also trying to give staff a channel through which they can voice concerns. Many feel they are not consulted about changes nor listened to. This needs to change. The staff who are doing the job day in day out, facing all the challenges that it brings, are the very people who should be listened to and valued. I want to act as an ally for staff to raise issues and help take this message to the people who can and should act upon it.

Some staff will still be sceptical about my role - that is understandable. Such is the culture in the NHS that staff do not feel comfortable raising concerns. Often, this is due to fear of repercussions, but it is usually because they simply see no point; nothing has ever changed and they have become demoralised by this.

One of the first issues staff have made me aware of is the lack of response to incident reports. I am concerned about this and have made the chief executive aware of it. I have been assured this will be addressed, and I will not rest until staff tell me that it has.

My chief executive has been very positive about wanting to know if things are not right for staff, especially if patients could suffer as a result. If he does not know about it, then nothing will improve.

I am keen to get this message across to staff. It is also a message that all trust chief executives should be sending out. One way of ensuring this becomes action would be to develop a similar role to that of ambassador for cultural change at their trust. There is a place for such a role in every trust. I would like to see all trusts signing up to the Nursing Times Speak Out Safely campaign and give a united message that the culture regarding raising concerns will change.

We all should be very proud of the NHS and should be working in healthcare because we care. Unfortunately, though, there may be times

when we see poor care, misconduct or unacceptable behaviour and we all have a duty to speak out about it.

Nothing is ever perfect, but I would like to see an NHS that truly encourages and supports its staff in raising concerns. I want a culture that expects and accepts that people will raise concerns when things are not right, and it to be viewed as abnormal for it to be anything different.

- For more details on the campaign, go to nursingtimes.net/sos

Helene Donnelly is ambassador for cultural change at the Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent Partnership Trust