Gary Wilson

NHS Governance

I was a Non-Executive member of the Board of NHS Health Scotland until 2013.

I do not feel the existing arrangements are satisfactory in terms of dealing with staff governance issues and think there needs to be far more scrutiny and independent reviews of what happens in Scottish NHS Boards. I would acknowledge the staff governance standards are excellent and very laudable. The issue in my view is there is no independent scrutiny on how these standards are implemented and there is nowhere for staff to go if they feel treated in a way contrary to these standards. I was a member of staff as well as a non-executive and so have observed things from different angles.

The Board I worked for scored high (in the NHS staff survey) for staff feeling bullied by their line managers. I recall the response to this was staff just do not like being managed. There were token gestures towards addressing this but there was no improvement as the culture was not to speak out. I did try and get my Board to agree to anti bullying champions but this was strongly opposed within the hierarchy. I feel that Boards (like mine at the time) celebrate the good results (such as staff going the extra mile) and ignore the bad results like staff feeling bullied. I also have a concern that the Scottish Government does not look into issues like this when Boards get negative results and many staff have told me due to this there is little point in bothering to have their views recorded.

I feel that the standards are something Boards like to promote in glossy publications but are wide open to interpretation. What does well informed mean? what a member of staff on the ground would feel was well informed would be very different to what an HR Director would feel was well informed. Involvement in decisions is something the Board I worked for consistently scored badly for and to me this is not surprising. We had a potential office move and the Board was pushed into surveying staff on their preferred choice. However they ignored the majority view of staff and moved the organisation to the place not voted for by most staff and to the most expensive office. Staff were never given a satisfactory explanation for this move and this was after the Board had stated in their minutes that they would not increase costs by moving offices. Is it any wonder then that Boards often score badly for "involved in decisions".

In terms of "treated fairly and consistently then I have also seen staff being treated very differently (depending on their grade) and I would question where staff go to when they do not feel treated fairly and consistently. The telephone line provided for NHS staff just refers them back to their Board. I do feel that providing a safe working environment is a priority for most Boards possibly in part due to the risk of litigation.

In conclusion I very much support the staff governance standards as laudible aims but the problem is with the lack of any action when these standards are not being implemented, the lack of independent scrutiny of these standards and how they are or are not being implemented and the lack of anywhere for staff to go to if they feel these are not being implemented.