The Royal College of Nursing Scotland

NHS Governance – Creating a culture of improvement

The Royal College of Nursing Scotland

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world’s largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

Background

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Scotland is aware of the intense pressure under which health professionals in Scotland’s NHS are working.

The evidence provided in this document by RCN Scotland is designed to answer the questions set out specifically in the Committee’s call for evidence. It should not, however, be taken as addressing all of the RCN’s current concerns about the pressure on NHS Scotland and the staff who deliver services.

The RCN believes that it is important to remember that with the integration of health and social care, there are now NHS staff who are operating under Integration Authorities. Integration Authorities do not, at present, operate under the same partnership working model set out in the Staff Governance Standard. This is because there is not currently binding tripartite agreement between the Scottish Government, local authorities and trade unions.

RCN Scotland has assisted the Committee by identifying individuals who are willing to speak to the Committee at an informal meeting to discuss how NHS Governance affects them in their day-to-day work as members of nursing teams. As such, this evidence focuses on the high level work which RCN engages with as a representative organisation.

Does the NHS adequately implement the requirements of the Staff Governance Standard?

The national framework around the Staff Governance Standard in Scotland is strong. The tripartite arrangement between the Scottish Government, Employer (NHS Boards) and Trade Unions works well and ensures genuine partnership working and means that there is a designated cohort of people who make sure that the Staff Governance Standard is delivered.

The RCN would, however, question whether there is a significant awareness of the Staff Governance Standard amongst those who are not actively engaged with the national process.

RCN Scotland accepts that it is challenging to engage all NHS employees in a full and meaningful way with the Staff Governance Standard. But the most recent NHS Staff Survey [2015] showed that there are still significant challenges for NHS Scotland. For example, only 53% of respondents answered the questions ‘I feel senior managers responsible for the wider organisation are sufficiently visible’ positively. 59% of respondents responded positively to the question ‘I would recommend my workplace as a good place to work’, a fall from 61% in 2014.
In the 2015 survey 62% of respondents were positive when asked the question ‘My health board acts fairly and offers equality of opportunity with regard to career progression/promotion’, an increase from 59% in the 2014 survey.

For staff, it is important that the culture set by their employer is supportive and enabling. This is an issue which is wider than whether the Staff Governance Standard is adequately implemented.

RCN Scotland has, for example, provided the Public Audit and Post Legislative Scrutiny Committee with evidence in relation to its inquiry ‘the 2015/16 audit of NHS Tayside’ about the challenges around strategic leadership and culture which have been faced by that NHS board.

Are there particular areas of the standard it implements well?

The national tripartite model means that problem solving and consensus finding is strong and positive. Likewise at a local level, Area Partnership Forums mirror the national framework and work in a similarly positive way. The partnership working model in Scotland has been developed over time and has been successful in avoiding local industrial action (with the exception of the porter dispute in NHS Tayside in 2015), although there has been action taken over some UK led decisions, for example, around pensions.

In 2012 a review entitled “Evaluating Labour-Management Partnership in NHS Scotland”, was published. The review was undertaken by Nicolas Bacon and Peter Samuel of the Nottingham University Business School and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. It was an independent evaluation of the operation and outcomes of partnership between government, employers and staff representatives in NHS Scotland at national-level. The review concluded that “partnership in NHS Scotland has matured into probably the most ambitious and important contemporary innovation in British public sector industrial relations.”

The position of Employee Director within each NHS board is voted for by staff-side is a very positive role for staff advocacy in Scotland. Likewise, the generous level of facilities time granted to reps in Scotland is a positive for the system and allows for genuine staff-side representation and development across the NHS. This level of engagement means that staff-side representatives are involved with decision making from the beginning at both national and local levels.

Nevertheless, RCN Scotland recognises that there remains a challenge around individual staff feeling involved in a meaningful way.

Are there particular areas of the standard that are not implemented well?

There is a self-assessment of the Staff Governance Standard which is conducted annually for each area by means of a one hour meeting between an Area Partnership Forum and the Scottish Government with a Minister present.

RCN Scotland believes that this process could be improved upon by having more robust testing of the self-assessment process. There is a tendency for this annual meeting to focus on positive examples, when the NHS staff survey has highlighted areas for concern.