

PE1605/E

Written submission from Gary Wilson of 2nd October 2016

I would be grateful if you would consider this as a written submission on PE01605 to be published on the Parliament's Petition webpage

As an ex-Employee Director of NHS Health Scotland, I support the idea that the whistleblower hotline would take reports to regional Health Boards. Having served on the Staff Governance Committee, the Audit Committee and Remuneration Committee at NHS Health Scotland, I think this would be most appropriate. Like all of the Board's Committees, it comprises both executive and non-executive directors. As both a member of staff and a None Executive Director I was aware of issues that other None Executives were not aware of but often was not able to share these issues due to the claim that none executives were not operational.

I was also elected Chair of the bi-monthly meetings where Employee Directors from every one of Scotland's Health Boards came together - so I have an excellent knowledge of working conditions that affect the 160,000 employees of Scottish NHS Boards. I also served on the Scottish Workforce and Governance Committee (SWAG), who developed the role and remit of the Whistleblowing Champions, whom each Board has appointed from the non-executive directors who sit on their Staff Governance Committee. I was also a member of the group that drew up the revised Staff Governance Standards for Scottish NHS Boards and whilst these standards are excellent they are not always being implemented.

I agree with the petitioner that not only the Champions but all the non-executive directors who sit on each Committee need to have far greater insight into mismanagement and bullying concerns if they are to fulfil their duties to effectively scrutinise their organisation.

At present non-executive Boardmembers receive about £9,000 pa for sitting on the Board (most of those who sit on Health Boards are non-executives), but to date their knowledge of NHS workings only comes through reports via the Chief Executive. The hotline would be a radical departure from existing practice, since it would mean the non-executive directors would, for the first time, have direct knowledge of what goes in their NHS regions.

I think this can only be a good thing. For too long non-Exec members have had little knowledge of what goes in their Boards (and are often discouraged from asking probing questions), apart from what they hear from the Chairperson or Chief Executive when they come to the monthly meetings. The hotline gives a fantastic opportunity for them to get properly involved. It would create a mechanism whereby staff concerns could be

independently assessed and reported to those charged at the most senior level with overseeing the quality of the service.

For those staff that prefer anonymity, it would give a measure of security, though of course if it were a life-or-death matter I would hope the whistleblower would give evidence to the relevant regulatory body. But most importantly the hotline would lift the burden off the shoulders of the employee and give them the confidence to know that their concern has been formally registered. The hotline provider could then progress their concern and report back to them on any resulting action.

The Chief Executive of NHS Scotland recently admitted too many staff feel they cannot raise valid concerns about the service amid fears they will be victimised. (Herald, 26th September 2016). Mr. Gray, who is also Director General of Health and Social Care for the Scottish Government, said: "...when I speak to staff, there are still too many who feel that they can't speak up about a valid issue. Some say that they don't think that there would be any point – nothing would happen if they raised a concern. And others say that they fear that there could be consequences for them – perhaps in terms of their career, or a fear of being victimised. That tells me that there is still something we need to tackle."

I believe the hotline is one (but only one) of the measures needed to give staff the confidence to come forward.

It is also important to recognise that the scheme will equip the whistleblowing champions on every Board to carry out the tasks that Mr. Gray and the Scottish Government has laid down for them. Without a hotline like this, they will have no way of knowing if and when someone has blown the whistle- and if their concern is being evaluated or acted upon.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Wilson