

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1877: Provide body cameras for all NHS frontline staff, lodged by Alex Wallace**

### **Background**

The petition is calling for all frontline NHS staff to be given body worn cameras. The rationale given by the petitioner is that it would protect staff from abuse and violence.

Body worn cameras are mobile audio and video devices that allow the wearer to record what they see and hear. Devices can be attached to various parts of the body, including the head, a helmet, glasses, or to the body by pocket, badge or other means.

Body cameras are now a common feature for professions like the police but they are rare in a healthcare setting and so far have largely been limited to NHS security staff.

Previous staff surveys have found significant levels of verbal and physical abuse from patients and the public towards NHS Scotland staff. For example, the last Dignity at Work survey<sup>1</sup> found that 29% of staff had received verbal/emotional abuse from patients or the public in the last 12 months and 7% had experienced physical violence.

Abuse was most commonly experienced by staff working in the ambulance service and the State Hospital.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of body cameras**

The effect of body cameras has mainly been studied in law enforcement and a report<sup>2</sup> by the International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety details their benefits as; a reduction in the use of force by police officers, a reduction in

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Health and social care staff experience: report 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety (2015) [Body worn camera use in health care facilities.](#)

complaints against police officers, preventing confrontational situations and helping to resolve complaints.

The report also details some studies of their use by security officers in a healthcare setting which found a reduction in violence and a reduction in injuries to security personnel.

However, in a healthcare setting, their use by clinical staff raises concerns around privacy, patient confidentiality and the relationship between staff and patients.

It also raises issues around data protection. This is because body worn cameras record images and other information which can be used to identify individuals. They are therefore covered by data protection legislation and operators must ensure that the way they process the data adheres to the legal framework.

A key consideration is ensuring that there is a legal basis for processing the data. Consent can only be used where it is possible for the person whose data is being recorded to withdraw consent. This will not be the case in many healthcare settings.

Other issues which must be taken into account include how to minimise the need for processing personal data, how to keep data secure and how to ensure data is retained for no longer than is necessary.

### **Use in a healthcare setting**

Use by frontline clinical staff has been piloted in parts of England including Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust where they were used in five inpatient psychiatric wards.

The UK Government also recently announced they would be distributed to all Paramedics following a pilot in the North East of England Ambulance Service<sup>3</sup>.

### **Scottish Government Action**

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2 July 2018) [Paramedics to be given body cameras to protect them from abuse](#)

In session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government [submitted evidence on a previous petition on a similar topic](#). In this submission, the Scottish Government raised concerns around patient confidentiality, cost and the impact on relationships between patients and staff. It also stated that it felt it would not be appropriate for all frontline staff.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

As detailed above, the Scottish Parliament considered [PE1817 in session 5](#). This petition was calling for the introduction of body cameras for all frontline and theatre staff and was submitted by the same petitioner.

The previous Petitions Committee closed the petition following receipt of submissions from the Scottish Government and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) which detailed concerns about privacy, confidentiality and cost.

### **Key Organisations and relevant links**

Healthcare unions – e.g. BMA, RCN, UNISON, Allied Health Professions Federation

Medical Protection Society

Patient Advice and Support Service

Scottish Ambulance Service

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