



Department
of Health

*From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health*

*Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS*

*Tel: 020 7210 3000
Mb-sofs@dh.gsi.gov.uk*

All Chairs in NHS Trusts in England

11 FEB 2015

Dear colleague,

Two years ago, Sir Robert Francis published his public inquiry report on the failures of care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. His findings shook the NHS to its core, and I made it my priority as Health Secretary to work hand-in-glove with you and your staff to ensure that such an unspeakable tragedy could never occur in our NHS again.

With your help, the NHS is now turning a corner. Today I am publishing a report entitled 'Culture Change in the NHS', which outlines the work that has been done to implement Sir Robert's recommendations over the last two years. We have a new rigorous inspection regime, a robust special measures regime to help struggling hospitals get back on their feet, and new Fundamental Standards and a Duty of Candour. And, with your help, two-thirds of hospitals have implemented the 'name above the bed initiative' and over 200 NHS organisations are participating in the 'Sign up to Safety' campaign. So I would like to say a heartfelt 'thank you' for your support for this agenda, and ask you to pass that on to your staff who I know are working incredibly hard.

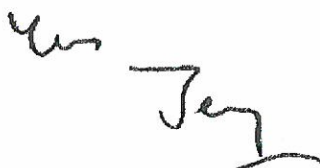
We all, however, understand that we cannot be complacent. I have heard many troubling stories of NHS staff who don't feel that they are able to speak up about poor care, or who have been treated badly when they do. This is why I asked Sir Robert to carry out a follow-up review, and to provide recommendations on what more we can do to create an open and honest culture in the NHS, in which staff feel supported to speak out. Sir Robert has published his report today: 'Freedom to Speak Up'. I know you will be as appalled as I am at the nature and extent of what he has revealed. Whilst none of this is a reflection of the values or behaviour of the vast majority of NHS managers and clinicians, I hope that you will work with me to ensure that we eradicate the bullying, intimidation and victimisation that Sir Robert describes. NHS staff should always be free to speak up if they have concerns and know they will be listened to and supported if they do.

I have accepted all of Sir Robert's recommendations in principle and will consult on a package of measures to implement them. I am hopeful that we can legislate in this Parliament to protect whistleblowers who are applying for NHS jobs from discrimination by prospective employers. We will also be consulting on establishing a new independent National Whistleblowing Guardian within the CQC, as well as asking every NHS organisation to identify one member of staff to whom others can speak to if they have concerns that they are not being listened to. Please do take the time to contribute to the forthcoming consultation if you have any thoughts that you would like to pass on.

I understand that Monitor and the Trust Development Authority are writing to all hospital Trusts today to request that managers have conversations with all of their staff to make them fully aware of how they can come forward, speak up and raise a concern – and also how they can best do this outside of the line management relationship if this proves necessary. I would be grateful if you could reiterate the importance of this to managers within your organisations.

The NHS is one of the safest and best healthcare organisations in the world, and we should all be proud of that. But that excellence depends on honesty when we get things wrong. We can be optimistic that if we get this right we will be the first healthcare system anywhere in the world to adopt the levels of openness and transparency common in other industries like the airline or nuclear industries. I want nothing less, which is why it is so crucial that we make all staff feel properly supported when they have concerns or suggestions about how to improve care.

With very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JEREMY HUNT