Staff Engagement in the NHS

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We have known about the importance of staff engagement in the NHS for many years ...

› We have been measuring levels of engagement in the NHS since the first staff survey in 2003
› Evidence from a range of sectors over at least the last two decades has highlighted the impact of staff engagement on performance
› More recently, analysis of the NHS staff survey has shown the importance of engagement for staff wellbeing and quality of care
› Most NHS leaders recognise the importance of engagement and a large proportion of providers treat it as a key priority
Levels of staff engagement are rising across the NHS after a sharp dip in 2010
But disparities are widening and some providers have had low engagement for a decade ... 

• Although many providers consider it a priority, boards dedicate limited time and attention to engagement and the volume of activity and innovation in this area appears to be relatively low.
The purpose of the review was therefore to consider how to increase levels of engagement across the NHS, including:

- Presenting the evidence that engaging and empowering NHS staff leads to improvements in services and quality of patient care
- Assessing the range of options for further empowering staff and strengthening their voice within existing NHS organisations
- Outlining good practices within the NHS and other sectors and the ingredients within these practices, including the role of leaders and
- Identifying options for increasing staff engagement through innovative provider models including staff ownership
Improving NHS Care by Engaging Staff and Devolving Decision-Making

Report of the Review of Staff Engagement and Empowerment in the NHS
What do we mean by staff engagement?

› Academics and HR practitioners have defined staff engagement in a variety of ways, including as:
  › a set of working conditions (such as empowering staff in their roles)
  › an attitude (such as involvement in one’s role)
  › a set of behaviours (such as ‘going the extra mile’) or
  › particular outcomes for staff or organisations (such as job satisfaction)

› However, most recent research agrees, broadly, on the concept of staff engagement as:

  ‘a psychological state associated with feelings of commitment and loyalty to one’s organisation and involvement in one’s work’
Research has highlighted the impact of staff engagement on staff wellbeing and staff costs

- In the NHS, West and Dawson found that higher levels of engagement were associated with lower levels of absenteeism.
- An increase of one standard deviation in engagement equated to an average saving of £150,000 per Trust from lower staff absence.
- This is supported by work from other sectors, Gallup in 2006 found that engaged employees took an average of 2.7% days’ sickness leave per year, in comparison with 6.2 days for disengaged staff.
- It also found that those with engagement scores in the lower quartile averaged 31-35% more employee turnover.

The King's Fund

Ideas that change health care
Research has linked engagement to quality of care, financial performance and innovation

- West and Dawson showed that higher job satisfaction is associated with lower mortality and lower health care acquired infections.
- Higher staff involvement was correlated with higher financial performance in the Healthcare Commission’s annual health checks.
- Studies from other studies, such as Gallop in 2006, show that engaged employees are more likely to be creative at work.
- While we lack hard data on levels of innovation across NHS providers, this may be one of the reasons why higher engagement is linked to better quality of care.
Our analysis suggests that higher engagement contributes to more compassionate care.

- This is consistent with insights from behavioral psychology suggesting that engaged staff are more likely to have the emotional resources to show empathy and compassion.
Our analysis also suggests that engaged staff are more likely to intervene to improve care.

- This is consistent with research from a range of sectors that highly engaged staff are more likely to take the initiative to address concerns about quality and safety.
Mid Staffs highlighted the impact of working conditions on engagement and quality of care.
Successful providers are actively developing supportive and inclusive leadership styles

- Previous studies have shown that NHS leaders favour pace-setting styles
- These are typified by leading by the front and laying down demanding targets, often with a reluctance to delegate

- The most successful leaders deploy a range of styles depending on the circumstances, but with less reliance on pace-setting, and greater reliance on affiliative and coaching styles

- Leadership styles which undermine employees’ authority and autonomy run the risk of disengaging staff

- Many of the NHS organisations with the highest levels of staff engagement have made a conscious decision to develop these more inclusive and supportive leadership styles

- For example, Salford Royal has invested significant resources in coaching and mentoring schemes

(Leadership and engagement for improvement in the NHS, King’s Fund, 2012)
Successful providers are simplifying hierarchies and empowering staff to deliver service change

- For example, Salford Royal is organised in four clinical divisions, led by a clinical chair, managing director and nursing director. It does not have an operations director and the executive team acts as coaches rather than managers of the clinical teams.

- As part of this devolution, successful providers have introduced programmes to support frontline staff in delivering service transformation, rather than imposing change from above.

- For example, Salford Royal puts together teams of frontline staff from across division boundaries to lead service improvement. Staff are supported by its Performance Improvement Directorate which provides expertise in how to trial and test improvements.
Leaders of successful providers are focusing on how to embed the right values in their Trusts

› Research from many sectors has highlighted the need for staff to have confidence in the integrity of their leaders, the fairness of procedures, and to feel valued and supported at work

› Successful leaders are developing a clearer sense of the Trust’s values, sometimes through mission statements but also through objective setting, appraisals and the rituals for celebrating success

› Some are also focusing on how to reduce bullying, where there is scope for improvement even in many successful NHS providers
A recurring message was the need for stability to create a high engagement culture ...
Recommendations

› NHS organisations need to renew their efforts to strengthen staff engagement, building on progress in recent years and narrowing the gap between high and low performers

› Staff engagement cannot be strengthened by setting targets and managing their implementation but depends on leaders showing their personal and visible commitment to engagement

› NHS boards should set aside time to discuss the results of staff surveys and to act on the results

› NHS organisations should devolve more responsibility to staff responsible for delivering services, removing unnecessary layers of management and empowering staff to take decisions

› Staff should be supported to improve care through investment in leadership and training in quality improvement skills
Reforming the NHS from within
Beyond hierarchy, inspection and markets

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