

NHS staff survey results 2018

The 2018 NHS staff survey explores the views of NHS staff on a range of different aspects of their experience, from their relationship with and support from their immediate manager; organisational culture; quality of care and patient safety; bullying and discrimination; and staff motivation and engagement. The 2018 survey received c.497,000 responses, representing a 46% response rate, and contains responses for all 230 trusts in England. This briefing contains a summary and analysis of the key findings including any changes from previous years' results.

Key findings

- Overall staff engagement is consistent with a 'theme score' of 7.0/10, the same as 2017. However some improvements across staff engagement measures have been seen: the proportion of staff saying they often or always look forward to going to work has returned to its 2016 level from 57.7% in 2017 to 58.7% in 2018.
- Staff feel more positively than a year ago about working with their immediate managers as 69.7% (1.3% increase) said they are satisfied by their overall level of support.
- Satisfaction with pay has noticeably increased from 31.2% in 2017 to 36.3% in 2018, potentially reflecting a positive initial impact of the three-year Agenda for Change pay rises.
- Staff health and wellbeing is declining by most measures used within the survey. While staff feel their managers are taking an interest in their health and wellbeing, less than a third (28.6%) feel their organisation definitely takes positive action, a 3% decrease from 2017.
- Too many staff are also working while they are unwell. In 2018, 56.5% say they have gone to work despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties.
- There has been a rise in the number of staff saying that they felt able to deliver the care they aspire to (67.2%, compared to 66.8% in 2017), as well as a rise in the proportion of staff saying they were personally pleased with the standard to which they were able to perform their job.
- Bullying and harassment remains a concern, with 28.3% of staff saying they have experienced harassment or bullying from patients, members of the public and their family members (28.1% in 2017), and 19.1% saying they have experienced bullying and harassment from their colleagues.

Pay, management and recognition

Since last year, there have been improvements to staff satisfaction with pay and overall recognition. In particular, staff feel more positively than a year ago about working with their immediate managers as 69.7% (1.3% increase) said they are satisfied by their overall level of support and 54.9% (2.5% increase) are satisfied by their manager's support in receiving training needs identified through appraisal.

There have also been improvements over time in the proportion of staff that feel their managers take a positive interest in their health and wellbeing (68.4%, up from 65.8% in 2015), and the number who feel their line manager values their work (72.1% up from 70.4% in 2015). The overall appraisal 'theme score' has improved to 5.5/10 from 5.2/10 in 2015 and there has been a steady increase in the proportion of staff undertaking appraisals in the past four years (88.3% up from 83.6% in 2014).

While coming from a low base, satisfaction with pay has noticeably increased, potentially reflecting a positive initial impact of the three-year Agenda for Change pay rises implemented from the middle of last year. The proportion of staff satisfied with their salary has increased from 31.2% in 2017 to 36.3% in 2018 (5.1% increase).

Other key findings include:

- 56.4% of staff said they are satisfied with recognition received for good work (up 4%).
- 61.4% say their manager gives them clear feedback (down 0.5%).
- 34.3% say their appraisal has helped them to agree clear objectives (up 0.1%).
- 22.5% say their appraisal has helped to improve how they do their job (up 0.4%).
- 69.2% say their manager encourages them at work (new measure).
- 72.1% say they receive the respect they deserve from colleagues (new measure).

Staff health and wellbeing

Staff health and wellbeing is declining by most measures used within the survey. While staff feel their managers are taking an interest in their health and wellbeing, less than a third (28.6%) feel their organisation definitely takes positive action, a 3% decrease from 2017. With sickness absence rates an increasing concern across the service, 39.8% reported feeling unwell as a result of work related stress in the past 12 months. This is a 3% increase from last year's proportion and the worst result against this measure in the last five years.

Too many staff are also working while they are unwell. In 2018, 56.5% say they have gone to work despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties, a slight improvement from last year (0.1% decrease). A smaller proportion of staff say they have been working unpaid hours than last year (57.8%, down 0.7%), which continues a gradual decline from 60.5% in 2015 but still remains very close to three in every five staff taking on additional unpaid work.

Other key findings include:

- 68.2% of staff do not feel there is enough staff at their organisation for them to do their job properly
- 45.1% of staff say they are able to meet all the conflicting demands on their time (up 0.5%)
- Only 22.2% of staff say they 'never' or 'rarely' have unrealistic time pressures (new measure)
- 53.1% of staff are satisfied with opportunities for flexible working (up 1.3%)
- 24.9% of staff feel pressure from their manager to come to work when unwell (down 0.5%)
- 27.6% experienced musculoskeletal problems as a result of work related stress in the last 12 months (3.2% increase since 2015).

Staff safety and quality of care

Quality of care

The survey clearly reflects the ongoing efforts of NHS staff to maintain high quality patient care, in spite of the impact of the time and resource pressures on the NHS workforce. There has been a rise in the number of staff saying that they felt able to deliver the care they aspire to (67.2%, compared to 66.8% in 2017), as well as a rise in the proportion of staff saying they were personally pleased with the standard to which they were able to perform their job.

However, there has been an overall drop in satisfaction with the quality of care staff say they were able to give to patients. 80.7% say they were satisfied compared to 82.7% in 2016. Similarly, a smaller proportion of patients felt their role makes a difference to patients (89.2%, a 0.5% decrease from 2017).

Safety at work – violence, bullying and harassment

A majority of 72.1% said they receive the respect they deserve from their colleagues, but bullying and harassment remains a concern, with 28.3% of staff saying they have experienced harassment or bullying from patients, members of the public and their family members (28.1% in 2017).

There has also been a rise in the number of staff saying they have experienced bullying and harassment from their colleagues (19.1%, compared to 18% in 2017). This is the highest level since 2014, and less than half of staff said that they or a colleague reported the last time they experienced bullying, harassment or abuse at work (47.1%). This has declined since last year, and remains lower than in 2014 (49.8%). It will be important for the wellbeing of staff that bullying, harassment and violence continues to be tackled from all angles.

Other key findings include:

- 14.5% has experienced physical violence in the past 12 months from patients, members of the public and family members (a decrease from 15.4% in 2017)
- The level of staff reporting physical violence when it occurs has dropped from 72.3% to 70.7%
- A small percentage have experienced violence from managers and colleagues (0.6% and 1.6% respectively).

Equal opportunities

The proportion of staff saying that their organisation acts fairly with regard to career progression and promotion regardless of ethnic background has been declining slowly since 2014, although the majority (83.4%) still believe this to be the case.

7.1% of staff say that they have experienced discrimination in the past 12 months from patients, and 8.1% from colleagues or managers. This has increased since 2016 from 6.9%, and BME staff experience a higher rate of discrimination than their white peers, with 15.4% reporting that they had experienced discrimination from colleagues or managers in the past 12 months. Similarly, 13.3% of disabled staff said they have experienced discrimination compared to 6.8% of non-disabled staff.

Safety culture

The data suggests an improvement in the culture within trusts around safety, and incident reporting. While there has been an increase in the number of staff reporting that they have witnessed errors, near misses and incidents that could have hurt staff (17.8%) or patients (27.8%) than in recent years, there have been year on year improvements in NHS staff perceptions of outcomes following errors, near misses or incidents. For example, 58.2% of staff said their organisation treats staff involved in an error, near miss or incident fairly, representing a 4% increase from 2017 and a 6% increase since 2015.

Other key findings include:

- 70.5% of staff said they would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice (0.5% increase)
- 58.5% were confident that their concern would be addressed (1% increase)
- 73.3% felt that their trust acts on concerns raised by patients and service users, reflecting improvements across all measures since last year
- 70.4% felt that their trust takes action to ensure that reported errors, near misses or incidents do not happen again.

Staff engagement and motivation

Overall, staff engagement has remained consistent over the past four years, with a score of 7.0. The proportion of staff saying they often or always look forward to going to work has returned to its 2016 level from 57.7% in 2017 to 58.7% in 2018. Staff are increasingly likely to recommend their organisation as a place to work (61.5%, an increase of almost 2% since last year).

In a similar light, staff feel increasingly able to show initiative in their roles, implement improvements in their own work, and 74.3% are able to make suggestions to improve the work of their team or department. This is reflective of the ongoing efforts trusts are putting into improving engagement with their staff.

New questions measuring staff intentions to leave their organisation, introduced in the 2018 survey, show that around a third, 29.9%, of staff think often about leaving their organisation, with about a fifth (21.6%) intending to leave within 12 months and 15.7% planning to leave as soon as they can find another job.

Given what we already know about staff turnover and retention in the NHS, these figures are unsurprising, but serve to reinforce the need for a robust workforce strategy that seeks to address the growing recruitment and retention challenges in the NHS.

Other key findings include:

- A smaller percentage (55.9%) said they are able to make improvements happen in their own area of work, but this has still increased from 2017 by 0.2%
- A majority feel that the care of patients and service users is a top priority (75.9%)
- Of all staff, 30.1% said they would stay in the NHS if they left their job, but 21% would not.
- 74.3% staff say they are often or always enthusiastic about their job (compared to 73.5% in 2017)
- 72.9% said they have frequent opportunities to show initiative in their roles.

NHS Providers View

In spite of the pressures they face NHS staff remain positive and dedicated to the NHS.

It is welcome that the recent Agenda for Change reforms have improved staff satisfaction with pay. While we may not learn the true impact of these changes until after the final year of salary increases in 2020/21, initial results are encouraging given the difficult process of implementation experienced by trusts over the past nine months. Additionally, working relationships with managers have improved and more respondents have recommended their organisation as a good place to work.

However, it is clear that rota gaps and staff shortages are piling pressure onto existing staff. More staff are reporting that their health and wellbeing has been impacted by work-related stress; a large majority do not feel there is enough staff in their organisation to allow them to do their job properly; and satisfaction with the quality of work and care they can provide has fallen. It is disappointing to see that more staff are experiencing instances of bullying or harassment by colleagues.

We can only address workforce challenges by urgently tackling the growing number of vacancies within trusts and ensuring people want to stay within the NHS. To do the latter, we must ensure that staff feel valued, are supported and have equal opportunities to develop their careers.

Through the development of a national workforce implementation plan in 2019, the government, central NHS bodies and stakeholders have an opportunity to propose and pursue strategies which will grow the size of the workforce in both the short and long-term. This challenge needs to be met with urgency and intelligence to relieve the stress faced by committed and commendable staff across the country.