

WHY BECOMING A PARTNER IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSIBILITY DEAL IS A NO-BRAINER

The importance of staff health and wellbeing in the NHS has been established, such that it is enshrined in the NHS Constitution.

“The NHS commits to provide support and opportunities for staff to maintain their health, well-being and safety.”

As part of this commitment, the constitution makes reference to the findings of the Boorman report and to taking the recommendations forward. We all know that the then Secretary of State for Health fully endorsed the report’s recommendations. As a consequence, the national operating framework for 2010/11 and 2011/12 has required Trusts to adopt a health and wellbeing strategy as part of their commitment to improving organisational performance and reducing sickness absence rates.

Add to the mix the recent Department of Health publications *The NHS Health and Wellbeing Improvement Framework* and *Healthy Staff, Better Care for Patients*¹ and it is clear that Trusts need to demonstrate that they are taking action.

The chances are that we are all doing something to promote staff health and wellbeing. We know from the recent national audit of compliance with NICE public health guidelines that there is a lot of activity. However, we also know from the recent report from the Health and Work Development Unit² that there is considerable regional variation in how well we are doing. We could all do better. Trusts tend to take notice of NICE guidelines because organisations such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC) are interested in compliance. So why not take credit from what you have achieved already and receive even more credit for what you will do in the future?

The public health Responsibility Deal has not had a great impact, yet, on NHS Trusts. This initiative, which was launched in March 2011, is linked to the public health white paper *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*³. It included a commitment to use the workplace as a vehicle for promoting public health and to encourage employers to work in partnership to improve the health and wellbeing of staff. The Department of Health is asking Responsibility Deal Partners to sign up to a number of core commitments. By doing so, they indicate their support for the Deal’s ambitions and commit to take action in support of them, where they can. The core commitments are broad commitments that any NHS Trust would have no difficulty with. They can be seen in box 1.

¹ Healthy Staff, Better Care for Patients: Realignment of Occupational Health Services to the NHS in England.

² <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/resources/nice-public-health-guidance-workplace-organisational-audit>

³ Healthy Lives, Healthy People, Our strategy for public health in England.

Box 1. Responsibility Deal core commitments

- 1. We recognise that we have a vital role to play in improving people's health.*
- 2. We will encourage and enable people to adopt a healthier diet.*
- 3. We will foster a culture of responsible drinking, which will help people to drink within guidelines.*
- 4. We will encourage and assist people to become more physically active.*
- 5. We will actively support our workforce to lead healthier lives.*

The key part of the Deal is the collective pledges. These are commitments relating to the key health promotion messages, such as physical activity and healthy eating. The good news is that there is a health at work set of pledges and the even better news is that all of us should be able to sign up to at least one of these. The pledges include managing staff with chronic conditions well, doing something about healthy eating in the Trust, encouraging stopping smoking and promoting health checks and signposting staff to relevant screening services. Using SEQOHS accredited occupational health services is another as is agreeing to report on health and wellbeing activity; this might be putting something on the Trust web site or including information in the annual report. To become a Responsibility Deal partner a Trust has to commit to at least one of these pledges.

So it is clear that becoming a partner is not onerous. It is free and it gives the Trust free publicity. All partners are entered onto an on-line registry giving public recognition of achievements. Private sector organisations are lapping it up; it's about time the NHS caught onto this opportunity. We all know how important reputation is to an organisation.

This is a great opportunity for OH to show leadership in Trusts and to demonstrate that we are there to benefit the organisation. Health and wellbeing is good for staff, good for patients and good for business. Why not receive recognition for what you are going to do anyway? Becoming a partner is easy⁴ and you never know where it might lead. It's a no-brainer!!

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⁴ <http://responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/sign-up/>