

Redefining Resolution in the NHS

Submitted by: The TCM Group

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Leading conflict management expert David Liddle:

“The management of discipline and grievance within the NHS is a public health issue, which should be taken as seriously as smoking.”

Leading conflict management expert David Liddle told delegates at the Redefining Resolution in the NHS Conference (held yesterday Tuesday 20 October) that “the management of discipline and grievance within the NHS is a public health issue - a silent killer, which should be taken as seriously as smoking.”

Liddle, CEO and Founder of The TCM Group, which organised the conference, went on to argue now is the time for the NHS to establish a culture of open-dialogue and collaboration, to encourage the constructive early resolution of conflicts before they escalate into damaging formal procedures.

The NHS is fearful of conflict

At the half-day conference, attended by delegates from across the NHS, David Liddle told the audience that “the NHS has become incredibly fearful of conflict and failure, so has wrapped itself in red tape to prevent risk.

“Conflict can be a driver of change, innovation and creativity,” he said. “It can bring people together and harness the utter brilliance we have in our NHS. However current grievance processes are more concerned about mitigating and preventing risk of conflict than harnessing the inner brilliance of the individuals concerned.

“Zero-tolerance policies don’t work and have never worked in the NHS.” Said Liddle. “You cannot, and will never be able to, resolve complex people issues by bolting on a zero-tolerance policy or initiative adjunct to an organisation.

“Instead, conflict resolution within the NHS must be systemic, structured, cultural and fully-integrated.”

Current processes undermine everything good about the NHS

Liddle went on to argue that paradoxically, current grievance processes encourage and drive a dynamic of mistrust, fear and uncertainty.

“The current management of conflict provokes and encourages fear. It seems paradoxical that the very policies established to tackle disputes actually make the disputes much worse.”

“Why do we rely on systems and processes that undermine everything that is good about the NHS? Why have we allowed ourselves to adopt a system that destroys relationships, and which has a significant impact - both physiological and psychological - on amazing people doing such amazing work?”

A new resolution system is needed

Throughout the conference, a range of leading conflict and mediation experts working within the NHS gave insight into how the current conflict management system might be reformed for the benefit of the NHS.

Delegates examined evidence of the impact that damaging conflict management processes have on absence, staff turnover, management, finances, and delivery of good patient service.

The TCM Group have helped over 300 NHS trusts and health/social care organisations in transforming the way they respond to conflict. TCM’s Resolution Framework™ offers a collaborative and robust system for resolving complaints, grievances, and disciplinary issues. It balances the right of all parties with their underlying interests and their needs, encouraging the constructive and early resolution of workplace issues, where appropriate.

David Liddle added: “When we release ourselves from a focus on risk and instead concern ourselves with people’s underlying fears, goals, hopes and motivations, we create a forum to be able to listen to one

another and gain insights. Ironically, the less focus we have on risk and more on people, the less chance there is of risk in the first place.”

“There has never been a better time in its history for the NHS to try new approaches to conflict resolution than right now. After all, there is no legal or ethical duty on NHS Trusts to have a statutory grievance or disciplinary procedures in place at all.”

For more information, interviews or to access a recording of the conference, please contact Erika Lucas at erika@erikalucas.co.uk, Tel: 07787773986 or Rebecca Griffiths at rebecca@griffithshuntpr.com

Note to Editors

Speakers at the conference included:

Nicky Ingham, Executive Director at the HPMA – Guest speaker

Roujin Ghamsari, Deputy Director of HR & OD at Chelsea & Westminster Hospitals - “Developing a Resolution Framework in a Large Acute NHS Trust.”

Chris Turner, Consultant in Emergency Medicine & co-founder of Civility Saves Lives - “The damaging effects of incivility in the NHS.”

Emeritus Professor Charlotte Rayner, Senior Researcher at Portsmouth University - “The evidence basis for tackling a broken grievance system.”

Jonny Gifford, Senior Researcher at the CIPD - “The things that we know about conflict but ignore.”

Chris Tiplady, Consultant Haematologist at Northumbria Healthcare HNSFT - “How supervisors are being trained to handle mediation.”

Karen Wadman, Lead Advisor at NHS Resolution - “Fairness, justice and learning when raising concerns in the NHS.”

Nicki Eyre, Founder of Conduct Change Ltd – “A person-centred approach to tackling Bullying & Harassment.”

Claire Gearon, Head of Programmes at the TCM Group – “Equipping managers with the skills needed to create a resolution culture.”