

To: • ICB chief executives
• NHS trust and foundation chief executives

cc. • Regional:
– Directors
– Chief nurses
– Medical directors
– Heads of communications and engagement
• ICB executive teams
• NHS trust and foundation executive teams

NHS England
Wellington House
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23 June 2023

Dear colleague,

Sexual safety of NHS staff and patients

In recent weeks, you will have seen reports of sexual assault, harassment and abuse in the NHS. It is right that we collectively shine a spotlight on this important issue. Any abuse is unacceptable, and I know you will share my determination to keep staff and patients safe. It is therefore timely that we redouble our efforts to ensure that every part of the NHS takes a systematic zero-tolerance approach to tackle this issue which encompasses prevention, support and decisive action against perpetrators. With over 1.3m people employed in the NHS, and with about 2m contacts with patients every working day, the NHS has a responsibility to protect staff and patients, and offer safe spaces and routes for support.

In July 2022 NHS England established a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (DASV) Programme to build on our robust safeguarding processes for protecting patients, improve victim support, and focus on early intervention and prevention. Amanda Pritchard has now asked me to act as the Executive sponsor for the programme on a day to day basis, and to expand its scope to support and enhance the NHS's response to domestic abuse and sexual violence associated with NHS services and/or premises, whether experienced by patients, staff or visitors.

The programme will lead and co-ordinate, working in particular with ICBs, to support them to discharge responsibilities including the Serious Violence Duty which, requires organisations, including ICBs, to collaborate locally to prevent and reduce 'serious violence', which includes domestic abuse and sexual offences.

The DASV team has three priority areas of focus:

1. **Supporting our staff** - A review of NHS staff policies, support and training on domestic abuse and sexual violence, with best practice shared across the system.
2. **National leadership** - NHS England's Chief Workforce, Training and Education Officer, Dr Navina Evans, will shortly host a roundtable for senior leaders across the healthcare system to discuss how we collectively tackle sexual assault and harassment of staff in the NHS.
3. **Improving data collection** – A data project considering how we best capture data, reporting and analysis across the NHS, following a recent healthcare interventions audit.

I would like to ask for your support for this important work within your organisation and as part of a collective across your systems and the NHS. This is a clear priority for both NHS staff and patients. I am therefore asking Chief Executives of ICBs and trusts to:

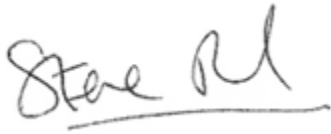
- **Appoint Domestic Abuse and Violence leads:** Designate a member of your Executive Team to lead this work, both internally and working with counterparts within your ICBs. They will act as advocates who can prioritise this important work to help build a network of leaders to share good practice, identify issues and develop solutions to tackling these crimes with as wide a group as possible. We would encourage you to consider designating an operational lead(s) to support them. In line with the NHS Operating Framework we will communicate with systems through Regional Teams and have asked them to similarly designate a member of their senior team as a lead for this work. In order to support this we would welcome it if ICB and Trust Chief Executives could confirm their designated leads to england.domesticabusesexualviolence@nhs.net by 13th July.
- **Review your policies and support:** To support staff and patients who experience these crimes in the course of contact with your organisation, as well as your data collection, reporting and analysis. Consideration should be given to dedicated sexual safety policies. NHS England will work with colleagues to develop and share best practice.
- **Sign up to the [DASV FutureNHS Collaboration Platform](#)** for useful resources.

I know that ICBs are finalising their Joint Forward Plans which should set out how the needs of victims of abuse in ICBs are being addressed. The [Joint forward planning guidance](#) emphasises the need to include consideration of how staff who are victims of these crimes are supported.

Finally, I have included support details for managers and staff in an annex that you may wish to cascade along with this letter.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and look forward to working with you to ensure the NHS is a safe space for staff and patients, and a place in which sexual misconduct, violence, harassment or abuse will not be tolerated. The NHS must be a place of safety, offering a safe space for victims of abuse to seek support. Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Russell', with a horizontal line underneath.

Steve Russell

Chief Delivery Officer
NHS England

Annex A

The DASV Programme Team can help with anything in relation to this letter and wider DASV work. To contact them, advise on your local leads and / or register for the national DASV stakeholder brief, please email england.domesticabusesexualviolence@nhs.net

Resources for NHS managers

- [The Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk in the NHS: Safeguarding Accountability and Assurance Framework](#) sets out the roles and responsibilities of all individuals working in providers of NHS-funded care settings and NHS commissioning organisations. This includes a duty to support victims to ensure they receive timely care and support, whether from the NHS, police or a third sector service. It also sets out the duties to attend to perpetrators.
- The national e-learning programme, [Identifying and Responding to Sexual Assault and Abuse](#), provides information, advice and resources for health and care professionals who may be involved in the care of people who have experienced rape, sexual assault and / or abuse.

Public information on accessing help

- **Sexual assault referral centres** (SARC's) offer medical, practical and emotional support to anyone who has been raped sexually assaulted or abused. They have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers who provide a safe space and dedicated care. Help is available 24 hours a day for everyone, whether the incident was recent or non-recent. Individuals can contact their nearest SARC to make an appointment. Further information is available at www.nhs.uk/sarcs.

Following the SARC campaign NHS England ran last year, you can still use the associated assets, which are available on the [Department of Health and Social Care campaign resource website](#) (you will need to register for access).

- The **Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line** and [online chat](#) is a government funded service run by Rape Crisis England and Wales. The Support Line, which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for victims and survivors of any gender, can be reached by dialling 0808 500 2222.
- As part of the Home Office campaign to tackle violence against women and girls, it has launched the **Enough** website to provide information on the steps people can

take to safely challenge violence against women and girls. The website, which also includes campaign material and where to get help and support, is available [here](#).