

**Guardian Service Report
TWELVE MONTH REPORT 1 APRIL 2021 to 31 MARCH 2022**

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to share the continued progress, development and evaluation of the service and recommendations from the Raising Concern Guardians. The paper has to be considered in light of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, its impact over the last 12 months, the renewal of the contract for another 12 months from November 2021 which was made in order to continue to provide an additional avenue to support staff during the most challenging of times. With the appointment of Dafydd Owen the service has been available bilingually which has been taken up in at least one instance where the contact preferred to be supported via that language medium.

Promotion/Communication Visits

As was the case in the previous year, the Raising Concern Guardians continued to follow the Government and Health Board guidelines to work from home throughout the period of the report. This has changed from February 2022 with access being granted to rooms on a pre-booked basis at the 3 major sites, utilising the Chapel at Singleton, Library at Morriston and a room in Block D at NPT near to Occupational Health. A full programme of virtual drop-in sessions have been undertaken throughout the year via MS Teams to replace the onsite promotional visits along with the offer of virtual presentations for teams and departments which after a slow initial uptake has begun to increase. It is therefore planned, that for the forthcoming year a hybrid mix of online and onsite opportunities will be offered as requested by the staff who have engaged and it is planned that the provision of F2F sessions will increase during the year.

There have been 104 promotional/communications sessions/presentations during the year with a spread of dates/times to reflect the 24/7 work patterns.

Number of concerns raised

There have been 74 (66 last year and 91 previous year) concerns raised by staff during the period of this report.

Contact has been made from staff to the Raising Concerns Guardians via email (606), telephone (337) and face to face visits (254). In 2020 the figures were 1441, 471 and 254 while in 2019 the figures were 906, 1493 and 152 respectively. The use of Microsoft Teams certainly increased during the year as the Health Board's main on-line platform, resulting in the use of other online options decreasing.

The Raising Concerns Guardians encourage face-to-face meetings online but follow ups may be by telephone or email. **With the continuing impact of the pandemic the quality of engagement to this point has been affected by not being able to meet contacts face-to-face and a return to sites is now being discussed and planned.**

There has also been a suggestion raised that the service should be signposted/directed to areas under pressure for staff support.

Themes

The concerns raised are broken down into the following themes:

Themes	No. of concerns raised		Percentage	
	01/04/21-31/03/22	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Patient safety	2	0	3%	0%
Management Concern	27	30	36%	45%
System and Process	13	3	18%	5%
Bullying and Harassment	6	10	8%	15%
Discrimination and Inequality	2	4	3%	6%
Behavioural / Relationship	22	13	30%	20%
Worker Safety	1	0	1%	0%
Other	1	6	1%	9%
TOTAL	74	66	100%	100%

The System and Process concerns relate to job roles (8) and service delivery (5). The “other” theme relates to concerns raised from staff that do not fall within the above categories, i.e. request for information. It should be noted that often the concerns raised could be reflected in more than one theme but a decision has to be made as to the most appropriate. **Whenever a contact is made we always advise staff (if they are members) to make contact with their Trade Unions to ensure that staff are aware of all the options available to them. To re-confirm, The Guardian Service does not intervene in formal Employee Relations Cases, however, it is important to share feedback received in listening to staff as part of initial scoping of a concern as well as providing emotional support.**

The outcome of the bullying and harassment concerns raised that are **closed**:

Outcome of bullying and harassment concerns raised	Number		Percentage	
	12 months	Previous 12 months	12 months	Previous 12 months
Informally resolved with Guardian support	3	3	50%	43%
Decided not to take forward	3	4	50%	57%
Resignation				0 %
TOTAL	6	7	100%	100%

The contacts follow a similar pattern to last year and again it was possible to help staff avoid engaging in a formal process, by empowering them to raise the issue themselves, while the service provided ongoing support.

Staff Groups

Detailed below are the staff groups who have raised concerns. The staff group is defined by the NHS.

Staff Groups	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Additional Clinical Services	9	8	10.5%	12%
Additional Professional Services	1	1	1.25%	1.5%
Administrative and Clerical	17	15	24%	23%
Allied Health Professional	5	9	8%	14%
Medical and Dental	2	2	2.5%	3%
Nursing and Midwifery Registered	32	28	44%	42%
Estates and Ancillary	7	0	8.5%	0%
Healthcare Scientists	0	0	0	0%
Role not confirmed	1	3	1.25%	4.5%
TOTAL	74	66	100%	100%

There are some interesting elements to these figures in that there continues to be a marked reduction in contacts from the Administrative and Clerical area over the past 2 years from the first year which may well reflect the number of staff working from home. As expected those from Nursing and Midwifery increased again unsurprising being very “the front line”. The efforts over past years are beginning to bear fruit with several concerns raised from within Estates & Ancillary. Also during the period of this report we had our first contact from a student and a volunteer.

Patient safety

While there have been no direct patient safety issues raised for the period of the report, one of the contacts from a previous year remains open. An action plan had been developed but as a result of the pandemic it had to be “put on hold” and as hopefully we come out of the pandemic it will be a focus to ensure things get back on track. Of course the action plan will need to be reassessed in light of the learning over the past couple of years. This area has been the subject of much discussion as in reality every concern raised could have an element of patient safety and one is reminded of Sir Robert Francis’s comments after the Mid Staffs investigation.

The reason why staff use the Guardian Service

Reason	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Fear of damage to career	3	5	4.5%	7.5%
Fear of losing job	5	0	7%	0%
Fear of reprisal	4	5	5.5%	7.5%
Believe they will not be listened to	18	29	24%	44%
Believe the organization will not take action	13	21	17%	32%
Have raised the concern before but have not been listened to / nothing has been done	31	6	42%	9%
TOTALS	74	66	100%	100%

There has been a marked increase in staff believing that they have raised the concern before but have not been listened to / nothing has been done. The figures would suggest that the organization has much work to do dealing with long standing issues that maybe due to the pandemic have not been addressed. The introduction of the “Just Culture” initiative is to be welcomed as this may assist in lowering this figure over the next year.

Cases by Directorates

The table below shows the number of concerns raised per directorate.

Directorate	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/2021	Previous 12 months
Morrison Delivery Unit	25	25		38%
Singleton Delivery Unit	10	11		17%
Neath Port Talbot Delivery Unit	7	5		7%
Primary & Community Services Delivery Unit	8	8		12%
Mental Health & Learning Disabilities	5	13		20%
Informatics	5	1		1.5%
Strategy	0	1		1.5%
HQ	5	0		
Cimla	0	0		
Corporate Nursing	1			
Corporate Governance	3			
Estates & Ancillary	4			
Not confirmed	1	2		3%
TOTALS	66	96	100%	100%

It is worth noting here the increase in HQ related activity from previous years. While the number of concerns from the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities directorate have dropped, the issue around “case management” remains a focus of concerns.

Action taken to improve speak up culture

Action taken to address themes

- In some instances, staff contact the Raising Concerns Guardian because formal processes are taking too long, although it has been noted that there has been a reduction in this sort of contact since other measures to improve formal processes were put in place by the Health Board. The Raising Concerns Guardian is able to explain to a contact; the complexities and time constraints that may arise during a formal investigation to support them make a decision around the course of action they would like to take, however is unable to engage until after the case has been closed if this is the route they have decided to take or have already taken.
- There is no doubt that that many staff even though they maybe going through a formal process value the Service as it gives them a safe space to vocalise their feelings/emotions as the Guardians have time to give them. This has been especially noticeable during the pandemic when demands on staff are increased.
- The Raising Concerns Guardians supports staff by offering information on the options available to them in taking forward their concern, offering safe, independent listening without judgement, highlighting the benefit of facilitated meetings. We always suggest that if members of a Trade Union they should make contact with the applicable Trade Union thereby ensuring that they have explored all the options open to them before deciding what (if any) action they propose to take.
- A benefit reported by the Raising Concerns Guardians where cases have been closed, is that they have enabled and empowered the contact to raise and take forward their concerns themselves by ensuring they have as much information as possible as to their options without engaging in a formal process.

Communication and escalation

For the majority of the year it has not been possible for the Raising Concerns Guardians to attend meetings and events including the monthly staff inductions to brief staff about the service. The Service was included as part of the virtual induction and a series of online sessions have been made available for staff across a range of days/times. In addition Guardians have since February made a limited return to site with sessions in Block D at NPT, the Library at Morriston and the Chapel at Singleton. The access/contact details to the Guardian Service are available on posters displayed across all sites, all the Health Board’s online systems with several referrals coming from the Health Board’s Wellbeing Service. However, the Service has instigated a revampe of all

artwork which will be delivered in April, so an audit of posters etc will be required which hopefully will further assist in raising the profile.

- The Raising Concerns Guardians become empathetic listeners when a staff member wishes to offload. However, as per our mandate we do not become involved in any internal disciplinary or grievance process. Staff are informed of our position at the outset as well as advised that in order to make a decision, they should consider all options including speaking with their Trade Union if applicable. However, Raising Concerns Guardians are available to listen in these situations and thereby promote the Speaking Up culture. It is pleasing to report that there has been some small improvement regarding interaction with the Trade Unions which has been beneficial to both parties when this has occurred. The Service would positively encourage “working together” with all Trade Unions as it can only be beneficial for the staff.
- Monthly meetings are held with the Director of Workforce & Organisational Development to talk through the monthly activity reports which includes themes and outcome of cases. No individual can be identified by the report, therefore keeping staff members’ confidentiality, which is essential and a contractual obligation. Eight-weekly meetings have been held with the Chair of the Health Board along with the Chair of the Workforce and OD Sub-Committee and both of their commitment to the Service is clear.
- Throughout the pandemic there have been regular virtual meetings with our Liaisons, Julie Lloyd and Kay Myatt which currently are on a 3-week cycle to ensure that any issues are discussed/resolved. We have also regularly engaged with Leads for the BAME Network and Calon throughout the year as well as meeting with the Lead regarding the “Just Culture” work which is so aligned to the service we offer.
- As a general rule we have made every effort to close cases as quickly as possible but there have been some that remain open as with Children’s Community Services for longer than we would like. We have made a real effort to improve this rate by instigating regular “case review” meetings with our Line Management which has borne dividend.
- Where an issue is agreed for escalation the system is used as follows:

Red	These scenarios require immediate escalation and response within 12 hours
Amber	A response is required within 48 hours
Green	A response is required with 72 hours

Learning and Improvement

- The Raising Concerns Guardians attend fortnightly (increased activity since the start of the pandemic) Guardian Service meetings where difficult concerns raised are discussed, peer support and learning gained, and good practice shared. Again, confidentiality is always held, and no individual is identified.
- During the year the Guardians have a six monthly supervision sessions with an external Psychologist to consider any difficult cases as well as their own mental/emotional wellbeing.
- As the Guardian Service has clients across a number of English NHS Trusts, we are in a position to compare and contrast best practice approaches (while acknowledging the difference approaches in the home countries) in respect to policy, service implementation and organisational response. This enabled at the height of the pandemic a report on COVID-19 issues from all Trusts using the Guardian Service to be circulated as well as other promotional ideas/videos to be shared where applicable.
- During the period of this report the Guardians joined the “Time to Change Wales” training session.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 situation continued to impact on the plans that we had jointly developed last year to develop the Service. With the limited opportunity to returning to site, it is pleasing that we are now in a position to plan our face to face promotion of the service and propose we progress the following recommendations over the next 12 months:

- While the commitment of the Board and Executive team at Swansea Bay University Health Board to the Guardian Service has been excellent, consideration should be given to publicising personal commitments from each member with regard to “raising concerns” in order to further cement to staff that the Board/Executive team are committed to the “Raising Concerns” Policy.
- A series of 1-1 meetings be arranged with each member of the Board and Executive Team to further strengthening the understanding of the Service as an agent for change working with the organisation for the betterment of staff.
- We would suggest that as a matter of course the Board undertake an Annual Review utilising the National Guardian Office Toolkit which is England is a mandatory function but would help embed the Service further.
- A continued focus on reducing the number of “open” cases will remain although much progress has been made this year in reducing the number.

- The issue of staff turnover is common theme from staff and there needs to be a concerted effort to publicise to staff the considerable extent of the efforts being undertaken to recruit new staff while ensuring that the programmes to retain and value existing staff continue. There is no doubt that the pandemic has also meant that many staff have revaluated their lives which will have an impact on retirements etc. In respect of recruiting new staff, the perception is that the Executive Team are doing little, which we know is not the case, so there is still work to do to educate around this. We would encourage in particular a focus of A&E for obvious reasons and the Service is more than willing to attend settings with appropriate PPE if required to talk with staff.
- There has been some feedback on the lack of a consistent policy with regard to exit interviews. On a number of occasions when staff have made the decision to leave the Health Board they have wanted to undertake an exit interview to give the organisation the opportunity to review any appropriate actions that might be applicable but this has unfortunately not happened. Whenever this has been requested on behalf of a staff member it is has been facilitated by HR but there is a concern as to whether there could be good learning opportunities being missed.
- Staff continue to report that the length of time taken for grievances to be heard is too long and exceeds the policy. Steps have been made to improve this and there is some evidence of positive impact, but it is essentially important that regular communication with staff to keep them updated is undertaken. This will also help encourage staff to raise any further concerns.
- A continued programme of communication and engagement sessions is required to promote the Guardian Service to all staff groups wherever they are located, as there are still areas that are not aware of the service despite the comprehensive plan undertaken so far. **This will be even more important as the Health Board works to recover from Covid-19.**
- There has been much work on “Living our Values” but there are clearly areas where the philosophy is as yet not embedded, which causes issues when there is conflict between staff. This is shown in the considerable increase in “behavioural responsibility” concerns, however real progress has been made, especially with new staff, but there is still much to do particularly with regard to more established staff. Contacts often tell us that they have been promoted to positions with little or no experience of or training to equip them for managing staff. There have been instances where staff have intimated that they would rather take sick leave than speak up, as they believe they will not be listened to or that the Health Board will take no action. There clearly is still a lot of work to be done to allow staff to feel they can trust the organisation and the Guardians are happy to work with the continuing initiatives that the Board have undertaken as well as assist in developing any new ones.
- In last year’s report it was noted that there had been a good level of engagement from HR at certain sites and it is good to report that this has forthcoming from all areas this year – long may it continue. Our specific thanks should be noted to Kay Myatt and our direct liaison, Julie Lloyd who have

always been prepared to assist whenever we have contacted them which has made our work so much easier.

- While that level of support would I guess be expected from HR staff (although in our view this is greater than necessary) there remains an often element of ignorance at Line Management level who fail to see the Guardian Service as agent to help sort issues rather preferring to take a defensive approach/view. Clearly there is much work here for Management training to become more fully embedded.
- The Guardian Service remains very keen to develop a working relationship with the Trade Unions and will support any measures that senior management feel appropriate as this would have a positive impact with staff. It remains disappointing that engagement remains limited as this is something that our colleagues in all other Trusts including those in Scotland do not encounter thereby providing an enhanced offer to staff.
- Consideration be given to formulate an action plan from these recommendations that would be discussed monthly along with the monthly reports to ensure actions are taken and progressed.
- Guardians on site to support staff.