

Considered BBTT Response to GGI Report Published on 27th August on bullying of staff at Acute Trust

General Remarks

The report is apparently very critical of the Trust, yet recommends no action against anyone responsible for abuse of staff. This is a disgrace. It means that no one can be confident anything is going to be any different.

The Trust held meetings with their staff on 27th August to tell them of the new dawn and the new values of courtesy and respect which will henceforth be an essential part of the Trust culture. Some staff were described by their managers as 'cynics' asking why they should believe it as they had heard it all before.

That is the question. Why should staff feel that things will be different when the abusers revealed by the mass of evidence given to the GGI investigators are all going to get away with it?

The report is bland and does not describe any specific acts of abuse which lie behind the generalities of the quotes and comments. This is a cover up. We believe that the original report was more straightforwardly damning. They have removed any specific criticism of individuals, but there are still comments in the report which make the conclusions ridiculous.

BBTT knows that the report was signed off as complete by GGI's Tom Mytton on 5th June. (He emailed us to say that.) On 19th June, at a CQC event to at Worcester Rugby Ground, a Trust representative told the assembled audience that the report was "badly written". It seems clear that the report was changed between then and 27th August, when we saw nothing of Mr Mytton and the report was presented instead by Ms Jayne Brown.

Misrepresentation about selection of interviewees

In para 4.1 (page 11) the report is less than frank about how more than 100 interviewees were selected. They were "self-selected", it says. However, we know that some, perhaps many, attended for interviews because the Trust's Human Resources (HR) department contacted those who they had recorded as making a complaint about bullying.

In fact, the GGI were dependent upon the good faith of HR, which we regard as part of the problem. We know that, if possible, they discourage grievances on bullying and harassment and they try to classify them as something else. (This appears to be recognised in para 8.4 page 26 but is not commented on. It is not made clear that HR have a role here.) We know examples of staff who were bullied, but were not contacted about the inquiry because somehow or other they were not enabled to bring a grievance classified as such.

The report hints that they recognise this problem in para 8.5, page 28. It says that what is perceived as bullying and harassment by the staff member is often termed as performance management by the alleged abuser. Like much else in the report, the comment is left behind.

HR and lack of faith in the system

HR get off very lightly in this report. At the launch of the report on 27th August there were quite a few references to breaches of policies. There is little in the report about the connivance of HR with this. It is supposed to be their job to ensure managers stick to policy and procedure.

There is one substantial reference to HR in para 7.4, page 23. The report states that staff did not always receive support from HR personnel. This is another comment which receives no attention at all in the report. There is no examination of the role of HR. We believe that HR always supports the senior member of staff.

This is briefly referred to in para 8.4 on page 26. There is recognition that the Trust's policy states that "HR support is available to all parties throughout the process". Needless to say, however, the complainants told the inquiry that HR usually supports managers.

Shocking Statistics

The final bland report still contains some shocking statistics regarding the views of 721 staff, of whom 670 had either experienced or witnessed bullying:

- 520 think that the Acute Trust does not treat bullying seriously
- 669 think that managers will not take action on their concerns
- 714 think that the Trust views those who complain of bullying as "difficult"

Yet on page 35, at para 10.5, the report describes the staff who believe that the Trust fails to take bullying seriously as "not widespread" and in "isolated areas". The report concludes ludicrously that there is no evidence that the Trust does not take bullying seriously. On page 36, they say that the Board "demonstrates good intentions" even though, on page 14, they report that the Board was apparently unaware bullying even existed.

With such bias, how can we take this report seriously?

Specific concealment of problems

BBTT members gave evidence to the GGI inquiry of the following matters, which should have produced investigations:

- The alleged abuse of radiography staff to cope with the overwhelming number of x-rays and scans

- The alleged abuse of Redditch A & E staff to make sure patients are dealt with within the four hour limit
- The alleged malicious allegations against a dedicated nurse which drove her to suicide

We know that staff have complained about serious problems of abuse in maternity services. This too finds no mention in the report.

In para 4.1 (page 10) they say they “examined 10 randomly selected cases in depth”. There is nothing in the report about the nature of these cases.

In para 6.4 (page 15) the report quotes some one that the culture at Worcester is “very pressured” and that at the Alex it is “paranoid”. But we are told nothing specific to explain these remarks.

Failure to address the root cause

The report completely fails to address the background of a lack of adequate resources which is an undoubted cause of great stress among staff and managers. This is part of the explanation for the widespread bullying, but the report never discusses it even though it is begging to be raised at many points, such as at paras 6.1 and 6.5.

Para 7.1 has several quotes from staff which hint at this underlying explanation of staff badly overstretched. Unfortunately, these points are quickly left behind and remain unexplored by the report. One says the key priority is to meet targets at the expense of staff welfare. Another says it’s a fear factor in this Trust. The management want a scapegoat. The attitude is very much whether your face fits or you are one of the gang.

BBTT believes the underfunded NHS in Worcestershire is being propped up by the bullying of overworked staff.

How do we bring new staff to an NHS Trust in crisis?

The Trust is in dire straits with a £48m deficit. Recent press reports are claiming that a big part of the problem is that staff are leaving and posts have to be filled by temporary agency staff. The knowledge that the Acute Trust is led by those who have collected massive evidence of abuse, but are failing to deal with any bullying managers, is hardly going to encourage applicants for permanent posts.

Conclusion

The report's conclusions are feeble. They do not follow what is revealed by the body of the report. Bullying of staff is endemic and not confined to “isolated areas”.

The report goes out of its way to make allowances for managers. It reveals no detail of the abuse and makes no recommendations that any managers or Board Members should be accountable for what has happened.

The GGI concludes weakly that the Dignity at Work Policy is not fit for purpose as a document or in the way it is administered. This serves to distract attention from specific abuse and the culprits.

The growing crisis requires a complete transformation of the dysfunctional management system. It may be that the two Worcestershire Trusts should be merged.

The plight of our health service in Worcestershire is a very serious matter. BBTT is a small organisation, and we need support to expose the massive problem of abuse of staff. In para 4.1, the report mentions that they spoke to union representatives. Over two weeks have passed since the publication of the report, but there has been no comment from the unions. There has been silence also from Worcestershire MPs. It is time both unions and MPs show they understand much needs to be done.

Meanwhile, BBTT calls upon:

1. Staff to contact us with more information on abuse with full confidentiality guaranteed.
2. The Trust to publish detail of abuse revealed by the inquiry so that the public can understand the nature of this abuse suffered by health service staff.
3. The Trust takes appropriate disciplinary action against managers responsible for abuse.