

Workforce Advisory Group Meeting

Friday 8th January 2021 13:00-15:00

Chairs: Colin Angel (United Kingdom Homecare Association)
Vic Rayner (National Care Forum)

Attendees: Deborah Sturdy (DHSC)
Jamie Weatherhead (DHSC)
Robert Frost (DHSC)
Eleanor Kershaw (DHSC)
Victoria Hasan (DHSC)
Henry Pattison-Hudd (DHSC)
Rebecca Digby (DHSC)
Amy Allen (DHSC)
Nisan Yesildaglar (DHSC)
Katie Weeks (DHSC)
Ann Mackay (Care England)
Anna McEwen (Shared Lives Plus)
David James (CQC)
Zameer Bhunoo (HSE)
Matthew Egan (Unison)
Karolina Gerlich (Care Workers' Charity)
Melanie Weatherly (Care Association Alliance)
Emily Muir (Skills for Care)
Jon Sutcliffe (Local Government Association)

1. Introduction and Priorities from the Chief Nurse for Social Care

- WAG welcomed Deborah Sturdy, the new Chief Nurse for Social Care
- The new Chief Nurse for Social Care outlined her vision for the role and her priorities
 - Workforce: the Chief Nurse is keen to maintain a sense of the reality faced by individuals in the sector
 - Research: understanding the complexity of nursing and for those in the sector is vital to shaping future policy
 - Profile: raising the profile of the sector, as well as awareness and expectations. Currently the narrative around working in social care is negative, but it is a place where individuals enjoy great autonomy and creativity. The Chief Nurse would like to encourage staff to be vocal and share their passion and excitement for the social care
- WAG raised other issues facing the sector which the Chief Nurse could consider in her work, including digital and technology innovation, and the need for support to the workforce as they conduct healthcare interventions

2. Vaccination: Operationalisation for Social Care Workforce

- The situation is rapidly evolving and just today the new Moderna vaccine has been approved for use in the UK, meaning another 10 million vaccines have been ordered
 - The Government is working to the target of vaccinating the top 4 JCVI priority groups by mid-February, which amounts to roughly 15 million people
 - DHSC have developed an SOP to look at the process for getting to the cohort of social care workers in the community that have not yet accessed the vaccines
 - Information will soon be published for personal assistants and other specified roles in the social care sector on the vaccination process for them

- Unpaid carers fall within the JCVI priority group 6, and so DHSC is working separately on identifying this cohort and ensuring there is a vaccination route for them
- More data will become available soon around number of vaccines administered
- WAG shared other issues arising within the workforce
 - WAG reported that sentiment toward the vaccine from the workforce has been very positive
 - Currently the vaccine is not mandatory, so while employers should encourage staff to take the vaccine, they should also seek to protect those who are not able to, for example for medical reasons
 - Scepticism of the vaccine could be overcome by stronger messaging from DHSC which includes carers, rather than just senior government officials

3. Staff Movement Update/Impact of Staff Absence and Self-isolation

- DHSC provided an update on proposals on staff movement, and sought feedback from WAG on potential staff capacity issues
- Feedback from WAG
 - Levels of staff absence are highly variable between regions
 - There are providers that have been affected by staff trying to take advantage of the system, whereby they are close contacts of those who test positive and therefore also have to self-isolate

4. Discussion on Workforce Implications of Lockdown

- Feedback from WAG:
 - There is increased fear on the frontline than in past lockdowns, particularly as a result of the announcement of the new variant of the virus
 - The workforce face higher anxiety as a result of tougher enforcement, in case their movements are more closely scrutinised or questioned
 - The length of the pandemic has had a marked effect on the mental wellbeing of the workforce, who are often overworked and fatigued