

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust submission to Southwark Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, November 2021

This briefing is designed to provide the Southwark Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee with key information requested from King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in relation to i) the impact of Brexit and ii) how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the health and wellbeing of our 13,5000 staff.

1. Brexit

The impact on the health and care workforce

King's employs 13,500 staff across all our sites and services. We employ staff from more than 30 different nationalities, and currently have just short of 10% of our workforce who are EU nationals.

In summary, we have not seen a significant increase in EU staff leaving employment with King's due to Brexit. The numbers of EU employees that work at the Trust has remained fairly static following the result of the referendum in 2016, and throughout the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Pre Settled Status and Settled Status

Throughout the Government's negotiations with the EU on the UK's future relationship, King's took seriously its role in providing assurance and regular updates to our staff about the impact that any deal agreed would have on our ability to staff services safely, and provide the very best care.

To support our staff, we issued regular Trust-wide communications and also provided bespoke communications and support to our members of staff who are EU nationals. This tailored communication increased during May and June 2021, as the 30 June 2021 deadline approached. We worked hard to ensure our staff were equipped with all the information required in order to maintain their right to work via the Government's Pre Settled Status or Settled Status schemes.

In advance of the deadline to complete these right to work applications, there remained no legal obligation currently for staff to inform the Trust that they have applied to the settlement scheme, or to tell us about the status of their application. The NHS was permitted to ask staff to voluntarily share their status and so the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) – our internal resourcing tool - was modified to record the necessary right to work information relating to settlement. In line with advice from national body NHS Employers, we are recording information where it has been voluntarily given, which also supports national data sets so that the system as a whole can monitor recruitment trends.

As stated in pre-existing legislation, Irish citizens do not need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. Their right to live, work and access public services in the UK are protected under the Common Travel Area arrangement. We employ close to 1000 Irish employees at King's.

International recruitment

We have strong links with partners in other countries beyond the EU, and have been successful in recruiting health care staff from overseas for many years. This has supported us to keep staffing levels at the right levels, and mitigated against the risk of losing members of our staff who are EU nationals.

We have established international recruitment networks so while the immigration rules have changed in respect of EEA nationals, we are very familiar with Home Office requirements and processes around sponsorship.

Wider implications of Brexit

Operationally – while the Brexit negotiations were ongoing - we followed the guidance and protocols published by the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England and NHS Improvement. This involved scenario planning and putting in place preparation and mitigation plans covering any potential impacts to the workforce, supply chains, clinical trials and pharmacy. We also delivered training on our operational response plan to senior on-call managers in the event that emergency action would need to be taken in order to prevent disruption to services.

King's pharmacy has not yet seen a significant impact due to the UK stockpiling measures that were put in place. We remain on alert for any EU exit related medicine disruptions as we are a specialist centre for multiple areas – including Liver, Neurology, Haematology - and will escalate accordingly to the Government's Commercial Medicines Unit when necessary.

Similarly, we have, so far, been able to successfully manage and mitigate against any issues caused by disrupted supply chains. There have been numerous shortages which have been caused by changes to shipping and imports and these have had a knock-on effect to health care.

We have been working extremely closely with our partners across the Shelford group to share issues and support each other with concerns about supply. By acting swiftly with our partners, none of the supply issues on items including blood bottles, crutches and even fuel, for example, have not caused significant disruption to patient care.

2. The impact of COVID-19 on the health and care workforce

The Trust's preparations for the COVID-19 pandemic started on 24 January 2020, whereby King's adopted a command and control structure which has remained in place since.

We are incredibly proud of all our staff who have worked tirelessly with unstinting professionalism throughout the pandemic. We have also been at the forefront of the South East London COVID-19 vaccination programme, and our teams continue to protect our staff and local populations with COVID booster and flu jabs.

This month, the work of our researchers to trial the molnupiravir drug - which was found to prevent the worst side effects of COVID-19- were successful in having the medication approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This is a fantastic milestone that King's was proud to contribute to.

Staff wellbeing

Since the pandemic began, staff support initiatives have developed exponentially in an attempt to match the circumstances that our staff have faced. The physical and mental health and wellbeing of our staff is extremely important to us, and we recognise that the pandemic has caused heightened anxiety and stress.

Our comprehensive and well-resourced staff support offer continues to support the wellbeing of our workforce and mitigate against the development of mental health-related distress. The programme focuses on supporting and building the resilience of teams and managers, and provides psychological interventions to staff at high risk of developing mental ill-health.

We have a staff psychological support service, and established a specific occupational health team to help staff who may be experiencing symptoms of burnout or poor mental health. This also includes bespoke support for staff coping with the symptoms of long COVID.

A large number of staff, including many with specialist mental health training, were mobilised and/or voluntarily redeployed into staff support roles so that we could ensure access to psychological and wellbeing support was easy and timely.

Our outreach included surgeries in the staff wellbeing hubs, ward-based in-reach support and individual support via psychological therapists. These volunteers came from both within the hospital across departments and teams, and from external partner organisations including King's College London (KCL) and South London and Maudsley (SLaM).

Actions we have taken across the Trust so far to support wellbeing include:

- An additional day of annual leave for staff to celebrate their birthday (4,017 days have been requested and approved as of the 12 October, 2021).
- REACT Mental Health Training and accompanying Train the Trainer Programme for managers and leaders to support staff with mental health conversation training.
- A comprehensive recognition programme including Thank-You Week and Brilliant People Week.
- £350,000 made available by the Trust as a 'Feel Good Fund' which departments can apply for to spend on a team activity.
- A programme of Trust-wide Schwarz Rounds which provide a safe and open space for reflection on the impact of the pandemic on staff so far. These have run monthly with speakers from across the Trust including attendance from members of the Trust's executive team.
- Reflect and Reconnect conversations as part of our annual appraisal cycle to review work balance.

An average of 10,000 visits (not unique visitors) are recorded at the wellbeing hubs across the organisation each week, and over 370 interventions have been carried out during the period between August and November 2021. These have included individual support, team day activities, art therapy, reflective sessions, end of shift reflection and stress awareness days. All health and wellbeing staff in the hubs have been trained in psychological first aid, appropriate signposting and suicide awareness.

Staff Psychology Service

The new Staff Psychology Service now comprises of two Principal Clinical Psychologists; one dedicated to Workforce and Occupational Health and the other focussing on staff support within Critical Care (CCU) and the Emergency Department (ED). A further three Clinical and Counselling Psychologists have been appointed to lead various projects and are expected to join the team in mid-late January 2022.

Keeping Well South East London (KW SEL) Portal

SLaM, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, Bromley Healthcare and Mind (Bexley) provide personalised wellbeing and psychological support to all NHS and care staff in South East London.

The Trust has made this portal available to all staff – not just clinical teams. Staff can use a live chat function via a widget on our intranet to speak to trained psychological wellbeing practitioners (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), as well as email, call or request a call-back. The portal offers fast track access to primary care psychology services.

For more information, please contact: Rachael Truswell, Head of Stakeholder Relations at King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust on Rachael.Truswell@nhs.net