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Convener
Health and Sport Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email

28th January 2021

Dear Lewis,

SUPPORTING THE WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH OF THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE

I am writing to provide an update on the work being undertaken to support the wellbeing and mental health of the health and social care workforce at this time in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

We are deeply appreciative of the hard work, commitment and professionalism of those working in health and social care. We have asked our NHS and social care staff to work through unprecedented times and often in unfamiliar settings. Many have been asked to learn new skills and work in new roles in unfamiliar teams and a large number have been personally impacted by the Covid-19 virus. Like everyone, they too, have had to adjust to the impact of the pandemic on their personal lives and communities, including having to look after their own families. This has been, and continues to be, no small ask.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting the workforce, working with our partners across health and social care, and we continue to work collaboratively to put in place a range of measures in response to their needs.

Practical support

As outlined by the First Minister on 22 January, we are pleased to be able to make £500,000 available to Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) to fund additional practical support this financial year, in recognition of the support that health and social care staff may need at this time. The arrangements for this funding have been put in place following engagement with the network of Wellbeing Champions, who have emphasised the value of looking after 'the little things' that staff need, like access to hot drinks and snacks during their shifts.

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This initiative follows on from my letter to NHS Board and Local Authority Chief Executives and HSCP Chief Officers on 5th January emphasising the on-going need to promote both the physical and the psychological wellbeing of all staff whether they operate in a hospital or community setting; and outlining this should include ensuring that staff are encouraged to take the rest and recuperation opportunities to which they are entitled and that they are provided with adequate and appropriate rest spaces in and out of hours.

Workforce Wellbeing Champions

A range of innovative arrangements to support health and social care staff was stepped up quickly by Health Boards, HSCTPs and Local Authorities at the start of pandemic, such as wellbeing ‘hubs’, common rooms and rest areas, helplines and listening services, practical support offerings, peer support, leadership development, and coaching initiatives. I understand that these have been greatly valued by staff. The recent Everyone Matters Pulse Survey 2020, which primarily focused on NHS and HSCP staff, highlighted some excellent examples of local wellbeing support and highlighted that staff had found greatest support from their colleagues and teams.

Our Workforce Wellbeing Champions group was established in April 2020, bringing together around 90 ‘Wellbeing Champions’ from across the health and social care sectors. The Champions continue to meet on a monthly basis to share their experiences of delivering local staff support services, to provide intelligence from the front-line and to co-produce national activity to support the workforce. We welcome the insights and experience that this group brings to our national policy-making, and value Champions’ close involvement in the development, implementation and monitoring of their organisations’ wellbeing plans.

Health and Social Care Mental Health Network

The Programme for Government (PfG) 2020/21 outlines a commitment to expanding mental health and wellbeing support for health and social care staff, including the development of a Health and Social Care Mental Health Network and enhanced access to digital resources. The Network includes the National Wellbeing Hub and National Wellbeing Helpline as well as additional funding to Boards for the provision of psychological interventions and therapies to support staff wellbeing and a new Workforce Specialist Service.

Governance arrangements are being put in place for the Network, including an Oversight Group, which will be chaired by Dr Elizabeth Kelly, and an Expert Advisory Group for the Workforce Specialist Service chaired by Dr Alastair Cook, Principal Medical Officer – Mental Health.

- **National Wellbeing Hub**

The National Wellbeing Hub (www.promis.scot) signposts Health and Social Care staff, unpaid carers, volunteers and their families to relevant services, and provides a range of resources designed to support the workforce as they respond to the impacts of Covid-19. The Hub continues to be well used by staff across the health and social care workforce with more than 64,000 users (at 18 January 2021) since its launch on 11 May 2020. There is an average of 1200 new users a week from a range of professional disciplines and sectors across Scotland – approximately 40% from the NHS and 30% from the social care sectors. Resources on “Coping” and “Self Care” are the most visited on the Hub. Online ‘Coaching for

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Wellbeing' support is offered through the Hub with more than 3000 hours of coaching having been delivered to staff from across health and social care services.

The Hub offers first-stage help and the resources on it, including digital resources procured on a once-for-Scotland basis, empower staff to look after themselves and to seek further help if necessary. The content of the Hub is constantly updated to include new and additional information in line with the pandemic and the potential needs of the workforce.

A webinar programme for all health and social care staff (and unpaid carers) during November and December focused on specific issues – fatigue/sleep, stress, anxiety, personal resilience – and introduced participants (around 1000) to the various digital solutions (e.g. Feeling Good, Daylight, Sleepio) available on the Hub. The webinars resulted in increased uptake of these resources. A further programme of webinars is being implemented from the end of January to March to address a range of issues in line with the reported pressures being experienced and to support staff to enhance their personal resilience.

- **National Wellbeing Helpline**

The National Wellbeing Helpline (0800 111 4191), based within NHS 24's Mental Health Hub, has been operational on a 24/7 basis since July. Trained 'psychological wellbeing practitioners' (PWPs) at NHS 24 offer callers a compassionate and empathic listening service based on the principles of psychological first aid. The PWPs also offer advice, signposting and onward referral to local staff support services if required, and arrangements are in place for staff to be seen outwith their employing Board if they prefer. To date, there have been over 145 calls to the helpline. The majority of calls are resolved at the first point of contact, with a minority (around one quarter) referred on to local staff support services. Around two-thirds of callers work in Health and one-third work in Social Care.

- **Additional funding for psychological therapies and interventions**

We are providing Boards with additional funding via NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to deliver a workforce development programme to increase capacity and capability to provide psychological therapies and interventions for health and social care staff when this is needed, around £500,000 this financial year and £1 million in each of the next two financial years. This programme includes national and local delivery of training and supervision in psychological therapy and interventions. NES has now received submissions from Boards, which outline that up to 16 FTE posts will be created to support the workforce over the next two financial years, including Clinical Psychologists, Counsellors, Project Coordinators, and Assistant Psychologists. To date, 5 FTE posts are already in place, with some sessional cover in place whilst further recruitment is ongoing. Some funding is also being utilised for equipment and other resources.

- **Workforce Specialist Service**

Planning is taking place regarding the establishment of a Workforce Specialist Service (WSS), which will be a confidential assessment and treatment service for staff. A workforce specialist service offers specialism in treating and supporting staff who:

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- experience increased risks of suffering mental illness including difficulties with addiction and suicidality;
- suffer stigmatisation and experience difficulty accessing confidential assessment and treatment for mental health;
- are often reluctant to assume the role of patient and to seek help due to concerns about professional implications (e.g. regulator involvement, detriment to career progression, impact of having time off sick).

Work has taken place with NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) to commission services via NHS Practitioner Health in the initial phase, and a contract has now been agreed. This offering will be rolled out across the health and social care workforce over the next few weeks, following further engagement with the health regulators and the WSS Expert Advisory Group. In parallel, my officials are working with NSS to scope and source the long-term hosting arrangements for the stand-alone arrangements in Scotland.

Remobilisation Planning

A letter regarding NHS Board Remobilisation Plans 2021/22 was sent to NHS Chief Executives on 14th December 2020. This letter specifically highlighted the importance of staff wellbeing and emphasised that the welfare of the workforce is a fundamental interdependency that should cut across every aspect of remobilisation planning. It also highlighted the on-going need to promote both the physical and the psychological wellbeing of all staff. We will seek to use the feedback process to ensure that wellbeing becomes an integral part of the workforce experience, in all settings, building on the initiatives that have been put in place by Boards, HSCPs and Local Authorities.

I trust this update is helpful to the Committee.

CLARE HAUGHEY

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