Response from DHSC to letter from FOM/SOM re NHS OH

Our ref: DE-1151757

Dear Dr Mcloughlin and Dr de Bono,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 October to Matt Hancock about mental health support for all doctors.  I have been asked to reply.

The publication of Professor Kinman’s and Dr Teoh’s report into the issues surrounding mental health and doctors coincides with work that is already underway to improve occupational health services for NHS staff.

The Government is aware that the NHS workforce is facing real challenges with more patients with complex problems.  That is why the NHS workforce and its health and wellbeing is one of the Secretary of State’s key priorities.

Work is underway to speed up access to musculoskeletal and mental health services for staff who need them, and a comprehensive occupational health service is essential to support this.

The Government is working closely with the NHS on this and earlier this year, the former Secretary of State, Jeremy Hunt, commissioned NHS Improvement (NHSI) to deliver the national‘ Improving NHS Staff Health and Wellbeing: Reducing Sickness Absence programme’, that aims to reduce NHS sickness absence by one per cent by 2020.  As part of this programme, NHSI are working with over 70 NHS Trusts, across all types of providers and staff groups, to develop ten high-impact actions for rolling out across the NHS.

I note your concerns that the current provision of occupational health services in the NHS are not uniform and that standards are not mandated.  Part of the health and wellbeing programme referred to above will see NHSI evaluating fast-track occupational health service models to better understand the variances between trusts when it comes to commissioning mental health support for their staff.  An analysis will be undertaken to identify opportunities for standardising these services across organisations.  The programme is supported by an Expert Advisory Board which includes British Petroleum and British Telecom, as well as doctors with significant experience in occupational health, including Dame Carol Black and Dr Steve Boorman.

In addition, in July, NHS England launched its new staff Health and Wellbeing Framework.  The Framework supports NHS organisations in diagnosing staff needs and interventions to address health and wellbeing issues. This includes counselling and talking therapies for staff with mental illness.  The Framework provides suggestions and good practice examples and includes the support required from occupational health in trusts.

The provision of occupational health services in the NHS is extremely important to the Secretary of State and he would welcome an opportunity to visit one, ideally coinciding with one of his regular visits to NHS organisations.    Please contact Mr Hancock’s diary secretary, Kate Invernon, at Katie.Invernon@dh.gsi.gov.uk to establish whether there is a suitable date for him to visit an occupational health service.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Annette Sparrowhawk

Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries

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