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BRIEFING 107

TACKLING CYBERBULLYING IN THE NHS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

As the use of online communications tools continues to increase. This guide has been developed to help HR and communications teams in the NHS tackle the issue of cyberbullying.

The guide offers some practical steps and tips on:

- 1) recognising what steps HR teams should take to address cyberbullying
- 2) ensuring line managers have the tools to adequately support their staff.

This guide also provides employers with a template policy on cyberbullying that can be adapted to suit local needs.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying can be described as the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.¹ This briefing explores what NHS organisations are doing at the moment and which management behaviours can help prevent cyberbullying. It also provides a template policy section on cyberbullying, which can be integrated into your organisation's most relevant HR policy.

A recent study by the charity All Rise Say No to Cyber Abuse has shown that the majority of NHS organisations do not refer to cyberbullying in any of their HR policies

1. Oxford English dictionary definition.

Four in ten NHS organisations have formally disciplined staff for cyberbullying

Cyberbullying in the NHS

In the summer of 2016, [All Rise Say No to Cyber Abuse](#) asked 488 NHS organisations from across the commissioning, provider and arm's-length body sectors to provide their HR policies which covered cyberbullying. As a result of this, 448 policies which would be used to cover cases of cyberbullying were received from 408 NHS organisations.

The statistics received showed that the top three policies to currently include cyberbullying were:

- IT and internet (31 per cent)
- Social media (30 per cent)
- Bullying and harassment (24 per cent).

Only 26 of these 448 policies specifically defined what cyberbullying is and what support was available for staff who are concerned about, or are the victim of cyberbullying. Read the full report on the [All Rise Say No To Cyber Abuse](#) website.

As less than six per cent of surveyed NHS policies cover cyberbullying, it is evident that most NHS organisations can improve their coverage of cyberbullying in their relevant policies. There is no right or wrong answer as to where your cyberbullying policy should sit, the decision to have an integrated or standalone policy should be made at local level by HR teams.

CYBERBULLYING AT INDUCTION – HR CHECKLIST

HR teams should use this checklist to introduce staff to their cyberbullying policy during their induction. HR teams should ensure they do the following:

- ✓ Clearly define what cyberbullying is.
- ✓ Signpost all staff to the support available if they feel they have been a victim of cyberbullying.
- ✓ Explain how to gather evidence, including:
 - ✓ taking screenshots of any concerning messages
 - ✓ noting times and dates (if not evident on screen shot)
 - ✓ passing information on to HR teams or line managers as appropriate.

Reinforcing line management best practice

As discussed in part one of our [ThinkFuture bullying and harassment podcast](#), line managers and colleagues play a crucial role in stopping bullying by challenging poor behaviour. When discussing cyberbullying, it is important line managers are supported to challenge, intervene and tackle poor behaviour online. It is likely that managers are already following a similar process to prevent bullying and harassment in the workplace, tackling cyberbullying should be an extension of this work and not seen as a completely separate part of their role.

Below are two line managers' checklists designed to help ensure good practice and provide a practical process to follow.

LINE MANAGERS' ACTIONS CHECKLIST

- ✓ Make time to understand cyberbullying.
- ✓ Ensure your team understands cyberbullying.
- ✓ Have regular conversations with your staff and remind them of your organisation's policy.
- ✓ Explain what is expected from your staff.
- ✓ Be aware of all social media platforms.

LINE MANAGERS' GOOD PRACTICE CHECKLIST

- ✓ Model the desired behaviours.
- ✓ Challenge poor behaviour.
- ✓ Intervene early.
- ✓ Use the [ThinkFuture toolkit](#) to adapt your management style to better suit different generations.
- ✓ Listen to the NHS Employers bullying and harassment podcast.
- ✓ Tackle poor behaviour.

Where you can learn more

Read and promote our factsheet which explains what cyberbullying is and how to deal with it:

🔗 www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2014/10/cyberbullying-factsheet

Listen to our podcast on bullying and harassment:

🔗 www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2016/09/bullying-and-harassment-podcast

Take a look at our bullying and harassment web pages for further information on bullying and harassment in general including key facts and figures around bullying in the NHS:

🔗 www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/building-a-diverse-workforce/get-involved/celebrating-diversity/bullying-and-harassment

Find out more about how to tackle bullying and harassment in the NHS from our infographic:

🔗 www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2016/06/tackling-bullying-in-the-nhs-hswpg-infographic

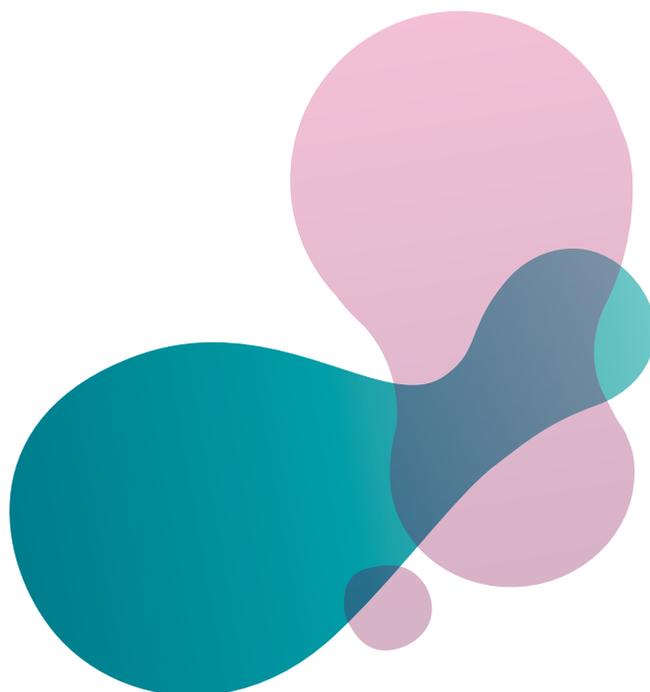
Read the collective call to action on tackling bullying in the NHS on the social partnership forum website:

🔗 www.socialpartnershipforum.org/priority-areas/tackling-bullying-in-the-nhs-a-collective-call-to-action/

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) have produced some specific and very measured guidance, which is applicable to all NHS settings. The guidance covers:

- Social media and bullying
- Social media, discipline and grievances
- Social media, defamation, data protection and privacy

You can read more on ACAS' website: 🔗 www.acas.org.uk



NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

Acknowledgements

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