Lessons learned review: 12 month progress briefing

Summary

This is an update on the progress we have made against our Action Plan which addresses the recommendations from the Professional Standards Authority’s (PSA) review into our handling of concerns about midwives’ fitness to practise at Furness General Hospital between 2004 and 2016.

Background

In May 2018, the PSA published its review into our handling of allegations against midwives working at Furness General Hospital.

Our approach to these cases – especially the way we communicated with the families – was unacceptable. We have apologised to the families affected by our failings. Acting on the lessons learned remains our priority.

Since July 2018, we have made significant changes to the way we do things to meet the recommendations outlined in the Lesson Learned review, which we have outlined below.

A new strategic direction for Fitness to Practise

For a long time in health and social care, there has been a tendency to focus on blame and punishment. We know that this can sometimes lead to nurses and midwives being less likely to be open about when things go wrong.

Since September 2018 we have been piloting a new approach to looking at complaints about nurses and midwives. We want to move away from a culture of blame when things go wrong towards a process that supports patient safety by creating a supportive environment for nurses and midwives to be open and learn.

Where something goes wrong and a nurse or midwife is open and honest about what’s happened, and shows how they’ve learned from their mistake, we may no longer need to take action to stop them from working. If they can show they’re safe to practise, we think they should be allowed to do so.

We think it is important that we work more closely with employers so that as many issues as possible can be resolved quickly and effectively at a local level.

We have researched and consulted widely on this new approach. Employers, nurses and midwives and the public were supportive of our plans and were clear that they thought this approach would help us to support learning, promote public trust and enable better, safer care.

We have now tested this new approach through five pilots. The pilots ran from 1 September 2018 to 31 March 2019 and have been evaluated. We are now moving into the implementation phase in the pilot areas.
Our Regulatory Intelligence Unit continues to develop, with the recruitment of additional regulatory advisers and the development of new analytical tools which will provide better insight. Our Employer Link Service is also growing and is vital in ensuring that we are flagging areas of risk with employers as soon as possible to prevent mistakes happening in the first place.

We have also recruited six new clinical advisers to our Fitness to Practise team. These advisers now offer clinical input on any public referrals involving a clinical setting. A toolkit has been created so that colleagues can recognise when clinical advice is required and can access it appropriately.

**Supporting the public, people who use services and families**

We have now set up our Public Support Service (PSS) which launched in December 2018. The role of this is to embed a person-centred approach in the organisation.

The PSS has launched a 24 hour independent support line for the public and those involved in our cases to make sure they are protected, valued and respected throughout the complaints process. This is critically important if we are to better support people who use services and their families, helping us to hear their voice and take their views into account.

We have started a pilot programme of offering meetings at the beginning and end of the investigation with members of the public who have made the referral. We will closely evaluate the outcome and benefit of these meetings before deciding how we will take this forward.

We have established a Public Support Service Steering Group which brings together key external and internal stakeholders and provides practical guidance on the development of the PSS and also our new advocacy support service which is underway.

We are making further improvements to our website to ensure it provides support to the public who are thinking about raising a concern or a complaint.

**Improving the way we communicate with people every day**

We know that we have not always been as open and transparent with people when things have gone wrong in the past as we could have been. We have now launched a new enquires and complaints function to address this which went live on 1 April 2019.

This new team will help us improve how we respond to requests for information, complaints and enquiries. Our approach will be based on a presumption of transparency and on ensuring those who interact with us are at the heart of what we do.

We have undertaken a review of all our correspondence and letters with the public to make sure they are clear, empathetic and offer the right level of support. We will continue to keep this under review.

The new team will also be taking forward the development of a more comprehensive approach to gathering and learning from customer feedback, which will support us to better understand what we are getting right and where we can still improve.
Enabling improved record keeping

We are enabling improved record keeping through our modernisation of technology strategy. This will ensure that we are capturing and storing information appropriately across the NMC. The first stage of this was delivered in January 2019 as part of the Nursing Associates technology solution. Further development will take place throughout 2019 and 2020.

Better understanding the people we are here to serve

We recognise that we need to connect with the people we serve and those we regulate so that we can truly understand what they expect from professional regulation. We therefore commissioned research to better understand what people think our role should be and why. This research has provided us with useful insights and will feed into the development of our new strategy going forward.

We recognise that there is more we can do to listen to the public, families, and groups that represent them. We have developing a programme of events with these groups to make sure that we are engaging with them on an ongoing basis and that they are involved in co-producing our future work and strategy.

Treating people with empathy and respect: embedding our values and behaviours

Since the publication of the Lessons Learned review, we have been talking to colleagues across the organisation about what changes we need to make together so that we demonstrate greater empathy and understanding for those we are working with and supporting.

Our all-employee conference took place in November 2018 and offered us the chance to talk to our colleagues about values and behaviours. Following on from feedback at the conference, we have made changes to the way we advertise roles, train our managers and induct our colleagues to improve knowledge and understanding of the importance of the person-centred approach we want to see at the NMC.

We are also reviewing our People Strategy to ensure that we are focusing on attention on the right areas and will be developing new values and behaviours throughout 2019.

Future midwife

We know that the context in which midwives practice is constantly changing. The demographics, health profiles and birthing choices of women have never been more diverse and this should inform what a midwife needs to know to practise safely and effectively.

We are developing new standards of proficiency for registered midwives to ensure that the midwives of the future are ready for the challenges ahead and can deliver better, safer care. This work is being led by Mary Renfrew, Professor of Mother and Infant Health at the University of Dundee and we proactively sought the views of midwives,
women, families, educators and students on what should be included in the new standards.

We held a 12-week consultation on our new draft standards and heard from over 3000 people at a range of events, meetings and conferences on what they thought of the draft standards.

We are now evaluating the responses from the consultation and will use this to further refine the standards before they are launched in early 2020.

**Future Strategy 2020-2025**

We know that health and social care is continuously changing and that as one of the largest professional regulators, we need to keep pace.

This year the Nursing and Midwifery Council is developing our new strategy for 2020-2025 to make sure we are fit for the future. Just like any other part of the health and social care system we recognise we should not operate in isolation.

Throughout 2019-2020, we want to work with as many people as possible to make sure our strategy meets the needs and expectations of the public and the professionals on our register, as well as aligning with the work of our partners.

We will be launching our new strategy in April 2020. For further information about the development work on this, please visit: [https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/shaping-the-future/](https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/shaping-the-future/)

**Conclusion**

Over the last 12 months we have placed significant focus on taking forward the recommendations from the Lessons Learned review and we have seen substantial changes made. Strong foundations have now been laid for further improvements and for our work on the new NMC strategy.

We have received positive feedback about our direction of travel and there is a strong desire amongst our stakeholders to continue to work with us on this journey. However, we are not complacent about the progress made nor the further improvements we can achieve. The Council and Executive Team are committed to ensuring that the lessons are learned from the PSA review.

**For more information**

For further information please contact our Public Affairs team on 0207 681 5893 or via email at Public.Affairs@nmc-uk.org