

NHS Staff Survey – Note explaining survey confidentiality

It is important to continuously reassure staff about the confidentiality of the staff survey.

Confidentiality of responses can be completely guaranteed no matter what their role is in their organisation. This is because all responses are sent off site and gathered by an independent survey contractor. NHS England does not allow survey contractors to report back data to any organisation where there are fewer than 11 respondents in a department or demographic group. The independent survey contractors collate the results for the organisation and produce a report that shows the results at an organisational level, divisional level or department level. No report is ever provided by them that shows the results or answers to the questionnaire at an individual level.

Respondents cannot be individually identified from their survey results because independent contractors are responsible for processing and aggregating the Staff Survey data. Bar codes and personalised logins are used purely to identify if a person has previously responded, this stops additional mailings being sent to those who have already responded. The organisation does not have access to the online responses or paper questionnaires or to any personal data (including names and addresses). The report that is sent back to the organisation presents the survey findings in summary form, and does not reveal the identity of the staff surveyed.

For paper surveys, each questionnaire contains a unique identification (ID) number so the staff member's name and work contact details are not on the questionnaire. Survey contractors use the ID numbers to ensure that reminder letters are only sent to staff who have not returned a questionnaire. As staff return their completed questionnaires directly to an external survey contractor, there is no way that anyone in an NHS organisation will be able to link data with a particular ID number or individual. Organisations will only receive reports of the summary survey findings.

Effectively communicating these messages to staff provides assurances about the confidentiality of the survey and can help maintain and improve response rates. The attached letter is from Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust. In this instance, the letter is signed by a senior manager, the Chief Executive though there may be a case for a co-signed letter which includes staff side representatives.

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Dear colleague,

Enclosed with this letter are details of how to complete this year's NHS annual staff survey. For those of you who are new to the NHS, this survey is the annual national survey for everyone who works across every organisation within the NHS. The survey has taken place every year for the past 14 years; it tells all of us who work for the NHS what is really great about working for the NHS and what isn't so great.

At BHT, we ask everyone to complete a survey. I am therefore writing to ask you to complete the survey, explain why it is important and reassure you about confidentiality.

Asking everyone across the organisation to complete the survey means that we have information not only about what it feels like working at BHT as a whole, but also where there are differences between sites, departments and teams. The more people that complete the survey, the more we – you, your teams, senior managers and the Board – can understand what is going well and what we want to change.

I often get asked about whether the survey is confidential. The answer is yes; no-one in the Trust has access to anyone's survey. The information you enter in the survey - either on-line or paper - is returned to an external organisation, Quality Health (one of two approved to carry out the NHS survey); this organisation collates and analyses the data for us; the reports they produce and publish on the national website are all completely anonymised. Under the terms of the national contract, Quality Health is not allowed to share any data from the survey which would identify an individual.

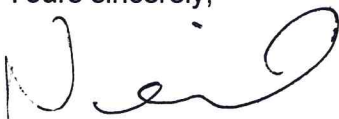
One of the changes we have made this year as a result of feedback from many of you is that you can choose how to complete the survey – either on-line or via a paper questionnaire. Other changes we have made following staff feedback include:

- Providing water bottles to staff as part of our refresh, re-hydrate, refuel programme
- Training and development for line managers and staff to improve the quality of the appraisal conversations
- producing "thank you" and "well done" cards to recognise colleagues

Finally, I have asked all managers to ensure that everyone has time at work to complete the questionnaire during working hours, which should take no more than 15 minutes. If you have any questions, please ask your manager in the first instance or contact Maria Earley, HR Project Manager on 01494 425490 or email m.earley@nhs.net

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the survey.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Macdonald
Chief Executive