

New report reveals NHS barriers to COVID recovery

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Research published from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), commissioned by Conflict Management Plus (CMP) and the Healthcare People Management Association (HPMA), has revealed that

a lack of effective HR practice is causing challenges to the overall effectiveness of the NHS.

[The report](#) highlighted that for most respondents the prime barrier to good employee relations is the capability and capacity of line managers to deliver on increasingly devolved HR tasks.

Further investigation revealed that the causes for this were more nuanced, particularly in terms of the operational pressures on those managers and the type and degree of support they expected from HR colleagues.

Unsurprisingly, given the impact of the pandemic, staff well-being and its management is also a key theme of the report. Effectively managing conflict was a major concern arising from the [research](#), where relationship and personal issues figure high as key reasons for conflict at work. In response, there appeared strong support for informal procedures in resolving disputes.

As a result, the report recommends pre-emptive changes to policy and practices such as managing requests for flexible working. In addition, the research calls for a consistent approach of informal solutions, such as mediation, to manage conflict, pre-empting more formal channels which can be met with resistance.

Dr. Tony Bennett, Lead Researcher and UCLan Senior Research Fellow, said: "The pandemic has catalyzed significant cultural change in all areas of our lives, particularly at work and in the NHS. Here we are dealing with people who were on the front line in the effort against COVID, so it's understandable that there are significant emotional well-being challenges that must be considered. We are also aware of the complexities that come with hybrid and home working, one of the key challenges that was identified for line managers. It is our hope that this

[report](#) brings to light some of the challenges faced by management teams and provides practical advice on how to overcome them."

Arran Heal, Managing Director at Workplace Relationships Specialist CMP, commented: "At the heart of the findings is a clear message: the shift towards a Just and Learning Culture is happening, causing ripples of positive change in the everyday experiences of NHS staff. In other words, it's an affirmation of both the importance of 'soft' people skills and the use of informal approaches in dealing with disputes and conflict."

Peter Bullock, Commercial Director at CMP, said: "Building a sense of psychological safety among NHS staff is essential, and that only happens as a result of informal relationships, on the basis of an open culture where people know they will be listened to—not a reliance on formal procedures. What's needed now is more consistency across NHS employers, a single approach that all NHS staff recognize and know they can rely on."

Nicky Ingham, Executive Director at HPMA, added: "This is important research for our members in relation to what the current thinking is in this area and how we as a profession respond, ensuring the creating of psychological safe cultures that demonstrate civility and respect for everyone. We need to take pride in what has been achieved during one of the most challenging times for the profession and the NHS."

Provided by University of Central Lancashire

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