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Nurses at Welsh hospital 'overworked, bullied and afraid to speak out'

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Ysbyty Gwynedd Hospital in Bangor

Source: Matthew Horwood / Alamy Stock Photo

A health board in Wales is to launch a review into reports of nurses being bullied in the workplace and pressured to take on additional shifts because of staff shortages.

Nurses at the Ysbyty Gwynedd Hospital in Bangor claimed that staff morale had “never been so low” and that burnout was at “an all time high”.

“Burnout is at an all time high at the site amongst nurses and other healthcare workers, and staff morale has never been so low”

Nurse

It is understood that the nurses were “fearful of repercussions” and so raised their concerns anonymously and via email to a member of Welsh Parliament, Rhun ap Iorwerth.

The chief executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, which runs the hospital, has since confirmed a review into the situation is to be carried out.

Mr ap Iorwerth, who is also Plaid Cymru’s spokesperson for health and care, said he recently received an email from a nurse at the hospital who told of colleagues experiencing workplace bullying and being being pressured to work in unfamiliar environments and away from their specialties.

They had also told him they were working “unreasonably long” hours and had a “poor relationship” with management.

Writing to Mr ap Iorwerth, an anonymous nurse had said: “Burnout is at an all time high at the site amongst nurses and other healthcare workers, and staff morale has never been so low.”

The nurse added: “Many have chosen to leave their posts. We already work long hours and then feel pressured to take on more shifts – often redeployed to areas where we do not specialise – to help with staffing shortages.

“It is impossible to possess a high standard of nursing knowledge for every speciality that an individual could be covering from one day to the next.”

“What’s hugely worrying is the impact that the current working conditions are having on staff numbers and morale”

Rhun ap Iorwerth

They claimed: “The situation has been escalating for years and has now reached a crisis stage with no solution.”

Mr ap Iorwerth took the concerns to the Welsh Parliament – the Senedd – in a meeting last week and said following his address, several more nurses reached out to him to reinforce and “emphasise” the concerns.

He said he was “was deeply saddened to learn about the very serious concerns of our nurses” and recognised that these issues had been raised anonymously because staff were “so fearful of repercussions”.

It was “clear” there was a “lack of trust” in the health board’s whistleblowing processes, he said, adding that “our nurses must be given the opportunity to be heard”.

Mr ap Iorwerth said he had had written to the health board, urging it to conduct an independent investigation.

“What’s hugely worrying is the impact that the current working conditions are having on staff numbers and morale,” he added.

“Some have concluded that they want to leave their posts, and that many have already left.

“At a time when we face staff shortages following the pandemic, we need to be looking at new ways of attracting new nurses to the profession and increasing training places.

“But we must also be able to retain the staff we already have, with their invaluable experience and knowledge.”

“We are committed to ensuring that all staff feel safe to raise concerns in a way that enables us to improve”

Jo Whitehead

In a statement, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board’s chief executive, Jo Whitehead, said the concerns were being taken “very seriously” and that it was “undertaking an immediate review into them”.

“We are committed to ensuring that all staff feel safe to raise concerns in a way that enables us to improve as an organisation and as an employer,” she added, noting that the health board head recently introduced a new speaking out process.

However, she added: “It is clear that not all staff feel that it is safe to speak out.

“It is important to us that we continue to improve the confidence of colleagues that their concerns will be addressed in a constructive way.”

Commenting on the news, Nicky Hughes, associate director of nursing (employment relations) at RCN Wales, said: “There is zero tolerance for bullying and harassment at work and we at the RCN take claims such as these very seriously.

“We encourage any formal reviews to ensure cultural changes are implemented and maintained.”

Meanwhile, a Welsh Government spokesperson added: “Any form of discrimination, bullying and harassment within the NHS is entirely unacceptable and we take these matters very seriously.

“Policies are in place to ensure NHS organisations take action to address any concerns raised to them and all staff are encouraged to raise any worries.”