

Research Briefing: NHS Staff Survey 2020

Introduction:

Caring unpaid for older and disabled relatives is an increasing issue for our time and one that is affecting more families and friends. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic the number of unpaid carers was increasing as a result of demographic changes and an ageing population.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into stark focus the need to support older, ill or disabled people and their families providing unpaid care. The health and social care system under significant pressure, local services reduced or closed, significant numbers of people having to take extra precautions to protect their own health, and many more people needing support than before, have all increased the need for unpaid care. Polling carried out at the height of pandemic found that an additional 4.5 million people had started caring, and an increase of 2.8 million juggling paid work and care¹.

For the first time, the NHS has included a question in its staff survey to identify carers. This is a ground-breaking step which has allowed the NHS to look at how well they are supporting carers as an employer and if there are any differences in services or Trusts.

Previous polling carried out in 2019 estimated that one in five of the NHS workforce was an unpaid carer² - a higher rate than other sectors because of the number of women and the ages of workers in the NHS. Analysis of the NHS Staff Survey 2020 shows that one in three of the NHS workforce is juggling work and care – far higher than anticipated.

Working carers were already struggling before the COVID-19 pandemic, trying hard to balance providing practical and emotional support, managing appointments, and keeping an eye on the person they care for – all alongside paid work. For some it becomes too much: every day, an estimated 600 people in the UK give up work to care.

The sheer number of people juggling work and care in the NHS shows that it must provide support for carers; and not risk losing this talent from the workforce. The scale of the challenge in a workforce of this size is considerable and our analysis of the NHS Staff Survey shows a mixed picture for unpaid carers working in the NHS. Although the NHS has made many positive steps to support working carers there is still more work to be done.

¹ Carers Week (2019) Carers Week Report

² www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/quarter-of-a-million-nhs-workers-juggle-job-with-caring-unpaid-for-loved-one

Carers UK is supporting the NHS to improve its offer to unpaid carers in the workforce, and all 1.3 million employees have access to its Employers for Carers portal and Digital Resource for Carers which gives them dedicated support and information on caring all in one place, as and when they need it.

Experiences of juggling working in the NHS and unpaid care

The NHS Staff Survey 2020 shows that one in three of the NHS workforce is juggling work and care. In this section we explore carers' experiences working in the NHS, and if they feel supported to balance work and care.

Trust Type	Number of respondents	Number of respondents who are carers	Percentage of the workforce
National Average	554,934	179,244	32.30%
Community	22,019	8,389	38.10%
Community Mental Health and Learning Disability	105,375	39,621	37.60%
Acute Specialist	17,197	4,678	27.20%
Acute and Acute & Community	384,019	118,278	30.80%
Ambulance	26,324	8,318	31.60%

There were higher levels of carers in Community and Mental Health and Learning Disabilities (38.1%) and Community (37.6%). There were fewer carers in acute specialist services, but at 27.2% this still represents a significant amount of the workforce.

Health and Wellbeing

Carers reported having lower levels of health and wellbeing than those without caring responsibilities, with carers reporting their health and wellbeing to be 5.7 out of 10, compared to non-carers reporting 6.3. This is in line with previous research from the 2011 census and the GP Patient Survey which has shown that carers are more likely to be in poor health than those without caring responsibilities before the pandemic.³

The NHS Staff survey asked whether, in the last three months, staff had ever come to work despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties. Over half (53.9%) of

³ Carers UK (2019) Facts about carers 2019

carers said that they had come into work despite not feeling well, compared to 42.6% of those without caring responsibilities.

Supportive work environment

A supportive work environment is key to enabling people to continue to balance their paid work with caring responsibilities. Carers UK's research has shown that for working carers, a supportive line manager / understanding employer is their top ask (89%), with the ability to work flexibly second (88%)⁴.

The results from the NHS Staff Survey suggest that the NHS has taken important steps to support working carers; however, there is more work that needs to be done. In the survey carers were more likely to say that they felt pressure from their manager to come into work; 28% compared to 23.7% of non-carers. However, there is strong evidence that unpaid carers are receiving support at work, and the NHS has made important steps to support working carers. Three quarters of carers (75.9%) say their immediate manager is supportive in a personal crisis, similar to those without a caring responsibility (76.5%).

The majority of carers 73.6% said that their employer made adequate adjustments to enable them to carry out your work, this remains lower than the 78.7% of non-carers.

Just over half (55.3%) of unpaid carers said they were satisfied or very satisfied with opportunities for flexible working patterns, showing that although many were getting the flexibility they wanted, there remains room for improvement to ensure that carers across the NHS are getting the flexibility they want.

Bullying and harassment

The survey did identify areas where the NHS should look to improve its support. 15.4% of unpaid carers reported they had had experienced at least one incident of harassment, bullying or abuse in the last 12 months, compared to 10.8% of non-carers. 10.4% of carers said they experienced discrimination at work from their manager, team leader or other colleague, this compared to 7.2% of non-carers. 11.3% of carers said they experienced discrimination on the basis of disability, compared to 6.8% of workers without a caring responsibility.

The majority of NHS staff agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safe at work, but carers reported this at lower levels at 76.4% in comparison to 82.2% of staff without caring responsibilities.

Shielding

The Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for health and social care workers, who have been at the frontline of the pandemic. For those with caring

⁴ Carers UK (2019) Juggling Work and Care

responsibilities for someone who is vulnerable, and especially someone who is Extremely Clinically Vulnerable, these will have led to difficult decisions about how they continue to work and keep the person they care for safe.

The NHS Staff survey asked if staff had been shielding and 13.1% of carers had been shielding in comparison to 9.1% of those without caring responsibilities. The survey indicates that staff who were carers were more likely to be shielding because someone in their household was, with 6.2% of carers in comparison to 2.4% of non-carers, shielding for a member of their household.

During 2020 Employers for Carers conducted research with employers who already had carer friendly policies in place, including NHS trusts and bodies, and found that around 6 out of 10 respondents offered different arrangements for staff who were caring for someone in the shielded category. 67% of these respondents said they enabled carers to work remotely on other duties, 40% moved them to non-frontline roles, 40% offered them paid leave, 33% offered unpaid leave and a smaller proportion (20%) enabled them to be furloughed⁵.

Conclusion and recommendations

The choice to include a question on unpaid care in the NHS Staff Survey has enabled the NHS to identify not only the significant numbers of people juggling work and unpaid care, but also to explore and start to address the challenges they face in the workforce.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the scale of this issue, the survey shows a mixed picture. On the positive side, many unpaid carers are receiving support from their line manager in a personal crisis, and high numbers reported having reasonable adjustments made for them to continue work. However, the higher levels of discrimination faced by carers than non-carers, and the lower levels of reported health and wellbeing show that more work could be done to understand caring responsibilities and how they impact on employees.

Carers UK is pleased to be working with the NHS to build upon its offer to unpaid carers in the workforce. All 1.3 million NHS employees have access to its Employers for Carers portal and Digital Resource for Carers which gives them dedicated support and information on caring.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on work, with both employers and employees having to adapt quickly to new circumstances. Employers for Carers research has shown that some employers have adapted and are providing more support and flexibility to working carers⁶, but that is not the case for all employers. It is vital that lessons are learnt from the pandemic, that current enhancements of support become established good practice, and that carers are supported in the workplace more widely. This is particularly true when you look at the percentage of working carers in the NHS workforce. The NHS especially cannot afford to lose carers' talent

⁵Carers UK (2020) Supporting working carers in COVID-19: response and reflections

⁶ Carers UK (2020) Supporting working carers in COVID-19: response and reflections

from the workplace, and there is an opportunity here to include supporting carers within both retention and recruitment strategies alongside wellbeing and diversity strategies.

The Government has also placed a high priority on continued workplace flexibility, not just because of the pandemic, but to increase diversity within the workplace and meet the responsibilities of our society as our population ages. As well as flexibility, Government has said that it will introduce legislation for a week's unpaid carer's leave. A consultation has been completed and we are awaiting the Government's response.

Carers UK recommendations for NHS England and Improvement:

- Continue to include the question in staff surveys to be able to track progress over time.
- Ensure that performance data monitoring for the NHS People Plan includes and tracks action to support unpaid carers.
- Ensure that supporting carers is within wellbeing, diversity and equalities national policy.
- Undertake further analysis to look at areas of the NHS that have greater numbers of carers to see whether the nature of work offers greater flexibility.
- Ensure that where examples are used to encourage good practice, they include unpaid carers to provide visibility and demonstrate practice in action.

Carers UK recommendations for individual Trusts:

- Ensure that unpaid carers' data is specifically pulled out of local staff survey data and analysed at a local level.
- Appoint a champion at Board level to support unpaid carers.
- Fully utilise and deploy Employers for Carers resources to help support staff.
- Ensure that all staff have access to the Digital Resources for Carers and that it is well cascaded in order to help them with the advice that they need to support care at home for their relatives and friends.
- Look at introducing measures such as the Working Carers Passport to help support carers and managers in the workplace.
- Introduce policies such as paid carer's leave – these can make a big difference to staff who are juggling work and care.

Carers UK recommendations to non-NHS employers to support staff who are carers:

- Include a question on unpaid caring in your staff survey to understand the number of staff juggling work and care.
- Introduce carer friendly employment practice, and consider joining Employers for Carers, Carers UK's business forum and service for employers in the UK. Comprised of a growing group of employers, large and small, the forum provides practical help to those looking to support and retain carers in their workforce.
- Employers should look at how jobs are advertised as flexible, review whether existing jobs can be carried out flexibly and promote its flexible working policies to its staff.

Carers UK recommendations for Government:

- The Government should continue to support flexibility in the workplace and provide clear guidance for employers.
- The Government should accelerate the introduction of five days Carer's Leave and introduce this as ten days paid leave.

Methodology

The survey results were collected from the NHS Staff Survey 2020 dashboard. Over 1.2million NHS employees in England were invited to complete the survey from all 220 NHS Trusts. There was a response rate of 47%, with over 595,000 responses to the survey.

This analysis is based on Question 27b *“Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: long term physical or mental ill health / disability, or problems related to old age?”*

Among this number, nearly 180,000 respondents identified as caring.

At Carers UK we analysed the data focusing our attention on Question 27b *“Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: long term physical or mental ill health / disability, or problems related to old age?”*.

We also drew results from the demographic breakdowns, looking at the demographic *“Looks after others with long term conditions (LTC)”*

It is important to acknowledge that the survey took place during October and November 2020; the responses will therefore be reflective of this challenging period and this should be kept in mind when considering the results of the survey.

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