

Recruitment of Patient Safety Partners in the Independent Sector Best Practice Principles

Overview

Patient Safety Partners (PSPs) are an important part of the [NHS England Patient Safety Strategy](#) and as relevant to independent sector providers as the NHS. However, due to the way in which independent sector providers are configured at both an organisational and site level, they are not always able to fully implement NHS guidance. This document, developed with IHPN members and the support of NHSE, aims to provide practical ideas on the recruitment, role and retention of PSP in the Independent Sector to optimise the effectiveness of the role and to gain most value and impact on safety.

Best Practice Principles

IHPN members requested some key principles to support organisations in the independent sector to recruit PSPs. The principles summarised below define the high-level objectives and standards for recruiting Patient Safety Partners. These have been developed taking into consideration the [NHSE Framework for involving patients in patient safety](#) (2021) and aim to highlight guiding best practice principles for IHPN members to support the recruitment of Patient Safety Partners into their organisations.

We hope that the principles will support IHPN members to recruit and work with patient safety partners whilst taking into account the various differences between organisations such as size, geographical spread and service delivery.

This sector resource also aims to help members when appointing PSPs and to enable an understanding of the integration of PSPs in our sector for key stakeholders (e.g. CQC).

Principles

The principles summarised below set out the high-level objectives and standards for involving PSPs. These have been developed from those in the NHSE Framework for involving patients in patient safety to reflect the distinction between the PSP role and that of the volunteer. Patient Safety Partners work in partnership with staff to influence and improve the governance and leadership of safety within an independent healthcare organisation. In line with the NHSE policy, independent sector organisations should:

1. Have a commitment to working towards recruitment of a minimum of 2 PSPs per organisation (so they have peer support) and to recruiting additional PSPs in proportion and response to the requirements of the organisation.
2. Make every effort to recruit PSPs in line with the NHSE Framework for involving patients in patient safety and aim to adopt one of the recruitment model examples outlined in this document.
3. Express a commitment to the involvement of PSPs in patient safety and promote their recognition throughout the organisation.
4. Where PSPs are recruited into the Corporate Governance Structure, effort should be taken to increase visibility and recognition of the PSP role within local hospitals.

5. Create a framework to develop and support PSP involvement as there is no contract of employment between PSPs and the organisation. Instead, the relationship is based on mutually agreed expectations about the role.
6. Commit to providing appropriate financial compensation for the PSPs, as this enables improved inclusion and more diversity.
7. Commit to inclusive approaches to attracting PSPs and seek to involve PSPs who reflect the diversity of the community the provider serves and enable monitoring of the diversity of PSPs.
8. Develop PSP roles and task profiles in line with the organisations aims and objectives, which are consistent with this resource, and which are valued by the PSPs in those roles.
9. Commit to ensuring that PSPs are offered training on the patient safety [NHS patient safety syllabus](#) training levels 1 and 2.
10. Commit to ensuring that PSPs are protected from any emotional and financial harm arising from their role. This includes the provision of mentors and buddy systems
11. Clear procedures are followed when inducting new PSPs to their role, the organisation and relevant policies.
12. Takes account of the varying support needs of PSP's and provides for them as outlined in the [NHSE Framework for involving patients in patient safety](#).
13. Commit to valuing and recognising PSP contributions and ensuring that the whole organisation is aware PSPs and the need to be given recognition.

Turning principles into practice

This section provides more detail on how to turn these principles into practice:

- Develop the right processes, procedures and frameworks to support quality PSP involvement
- Ensure effective recruitment and management of PSPs without creating unnecessary barriers
- Ensure that the approach is accessible and inclusive so a diverse range of PSPs can be recruited to reflect the communities in which they work. This includes involving people who have experienced harm.

Where relevant, good practice and useful advice has been adapted from [recruiting and managing volunteers in NHS providers – a practical guide](#), but in a way that recognises that PSPs and volunteers are distinct groups.

Flexibility in approach should ensure PSP recruitment, numbers of PSPs recruited, and the management of the recruitment process are appropriate and proportionate to the PSP roles, geographical spread of organisations and the context in which they operate.

Ongoing support for PSPs recruited by organisations in the Independent Sector can be provided via the [Patient Safety Learning Hub](#) Patient Safety Partner network to allow PSPs to collaborate and network with others across the NHS and independent sector.

Organisations will endeavour to recruit and retain PSPs and will explore various recruitment models as outlined in the Organisational Examples and Enablers sections below when experiencing difficulty in recruitment and retention of PSPs.

Organisations recruiting PSPs who will sit at corporate level must identify processes to ensure local sites have recognition of the PSP role and that the PSP role feeds into the governance structures at both corporate and local levels.

Organisational examples:

King Edward VII

The King Edward VII's Hospital recruited its first Patient Safety Partner (PSP) in December 2023 using a fixed-term contract model. This role has supported the hospital in valuing, listening to, and providing meaningful involvement opportunities for patients, their carers and families in the ongoing patient safety work of the organization.

The hospital created a bespoke PSP role description following a review of live PSP role descriptions available on NHS jobs. Interviews were conducted in a two-stage process, with the final interview panel including a patient representative from our Patient Participation Group. Upon successfully appointing the PSP, the role and its benefits to patient care were shared with hospital staff and the trade press.

The role has been very valuable and fundamental in supporting PSIRF within the hospital, providing a perspective through a patient lens to support developments and innovations, and driving continuous improvement in the quality and safety of services.

The role attends and contributes to key safety and quality committees across the hospital, including safety meetings where responses to incidents are discussed and reviewed in line with the hospital's Patient Safety Incident Response Plan (PSIRP). The PSP role also supports the review of PSIRs and participates in a program of 15-step service assessments, ensuring the patient's voice is taken into account fairly.

Epsommedical

Epsommedical commenced the implementation of PSIRF in February 2024 following the endorsement of our Policy and Plan by the Surrey Heartlands PSIRF Stakeholder Panel. At that time, we had actively commenced our quest to engage with potential PSPs to assist us in empowering patients, their relatives and carers in their safety and in assisting us to develop our safety culture through engagement with staff.

Our search included engaging with staff in relation to the role of PSPs, what we considered our requirements were and by approaching persons who we believed had an interest in working with the organisation in this area. We were in the initial stages of recruiting a potential partner (who had been recommended by a member of staff) and had developed our PSP agreement and handbook. The PSIRF committee had identified ways in which we could support the PSP in their role, the level of commitment that we felt was required from the PSP and established our expenses and remuneration guidelines.

The recruitment process was nearing completion at the end of May 2024 but sadly fell at the last hurdle due to issues regarding remuneration. This prompted a frank and open discussion with the potential candidate; the engagement provided helpful and pragmatic feedback which

resulted in a change to the expenses and remuneration guidelines formulated by Epsomedical, but this was insufficient to finalise recruitment. The search continues.....

PHL

PHL recruited a PSP who was retiring from their governance role within the organisation. The PSP had always naturally championed the role of the patient voice whilst with the governance team- which is crucial for this role.

The PSP also understood the diversity and challenges of services they operate, alongside lived experience of engaging with healthcare systems as a patient and a relative.

PHL felt the new PSP was a perfect fit for the requirements of being a PSP and are pleased to have someone with such a wealth of knowledge and experience now working alongside the PHL Patient Safety Specialist going forward.

OSD Healthcare

OSD Healthcare Published its PSIRF Policy and Plan in January 2024.

After several months of integrating the PSIRF into the organisation, the next focus is to bring in a Patient Safety Partner (PSP).

The role of a Patient Safety Partner (PSP) is currently being considered as a key component of our organisation's broader Patient Engagement Strategy. By integrating PSPs into our patient engagement initiatives, we aim to enhance patient care through firsthand insights and experiences.

The Strategy is to be reviewed and developed by the organisations existing Patient and Stakeholder Engagement Group alongside the proposed PSP recruitment strategy, selection criteria and training and development plan.

We are enthusiastic about the prospect of gaining valuable patient insights into our service delivery and safety practices. However, we acknowledge that the recruitment of a Patient Safety Partner (PSP) may present significant challenges.

Nuffield Health

Nuffield Health transitioned to PSIRF on October 1st, 2023, working with Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland as its partner ICB.

The challenges presented to an organisation with 37 Hospitals over a wide geographical area, in recruiting a Patient Safety Partner (PSP) who could represent such a broad demographic were not lost on the Charity and so the decision was made to approach the Charity Members to see if one of them would like to apply for the role.

It was felt that the most benefit would be gained from recruiting someone who had some insight into the Charity's purpose, strategy and values; who would bring prior experience of working with organisational boards and who, once embedded, could help co-create the role and recruit further PSPs to work in a Regional capacity.

The first Charity Member PSP commenced in January 2024 following some of the challenges reported by other organisations regarding employment capacity and remuneration. The approach finally taken was a bank contract.

Our PSP has a background at Director level in the Aviation Industry – having been described as a 'Matron for an Airport'(!), has worked as a volunteer for the Welsh Probation Service and is also a member of the clergy so has a wealth of experience in both safety and compassion!

He says that he was attracted to the role because of his relevant experience, because of its newness and also because he wants to look at patient safety from both the staff and patient's perspective. His vision is to be independent and provide the patient's viewpoint on what safety means to them, so that the Charity can be continuously evolving in this vital area.

So far he has provided excellent support with reviewing Patient Safety Incident Investigations and ensuring that these have been written for the patient and/or their family in a way that demonstrates the charity is being completely transparent in its explanation and findings; he has also reviewed the Nuffield Health 5-year Quality Strategy, again to ensure the patient safety and improvement agenda reflects and is articulated in a way that demonstrates the Charity's commitment to the compassionate engagement and restorative justice that are at the heart of PSIRF.

It is planned that he becomes a regular member of the Quality Board meeting where all things patient safety-related are discussed and we feel very lucky and excited to have someone with such a wealth of relevant experience to help us co-create this important role.

Enablers:

Independent Sector organisations are exploring a variety of recruitment models which are listed below:

- Sharing PSPs with ICBs
- Sharing PSPs with affiliated providers
- Sharing PSPs with local trust
- Recruiting PSPs in line with NHSE IPIPs framework
- Recruiting PSPs on a bank worker basis
- Recruiting new or existing volunteers in the first instance prior to considering recruitment of them as a PSP