



# **Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery**

## **Final Report**

**Developing Processes and Positive Cultures to  
Support Nurses and Midwives to Raise  
Concerns in HSC Trusts**

## **Introduction**

Nursing and midwifery leaders have an important role overseeing an effective culture that promotes raising concerns and are required to encourage and facilitate those delivering care and receiving care to also appropriately raise their concerns (NMC 2015). Ensuring an open and transparent culture in line with the Nursing and Midwifery Council's Code (NMC 2018) as well as our professional duty of candour requires appropriate systems to be in place to enable concerns to be raised, appropriate action to be taken in conjunction with feedback and monitoring to ensure learning takes place and that patients, families and carers are part of this process.

## **Background**

In 2014 the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC) and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) were asked by the Northern Ireland Nurse Leaders Network (NLN) to work collaboratively on a project to identify the reasons why nurses and midwives are reluctant to or fail to raise concerns about patient safety and patient care. A number of consistent messages emerged from this work which was presented through the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) to the Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee (CNMAC). It was clear that the promotion of an open work environment in which staff are encouraged as well as accountable for raising concerns about the safety of people in their care is a key attribute of a healthy culture and an effective work environment that helps protect patients/clients as well as staff. Nurse/Midwife leaders are equally responsible for making sure appropriate systems for raising concerns are in place and that they take action to deal with concerns raised, record this appropriately and monitor any resulting actions.

From this, NIPEC was asked by the CNO in 2017, through CNMAC, to develop and agree standardised job roles for Agenda for Change (AfC) 8A Lead Nurses and Lead Midwives to focus on the professional governance, regulatory, safety and quality requirements of the role. The development of these roles should focus on the principle of supporting bed to boardroom assurance from any NMC registrant through to the appropriate Executive Director of Nursing and to Trust Board as required.

## **Project Aim and Objectives**

### ***Project Aim***

To enable and support registrants to effectively raise concerns in accordance with the NMC Code (2018).

### ***Project Objectives***

1. Utilise the available evidence on raising concerns by nurses and midwives to inform the project.

2. Using a baseline questionnaire identify cultures and behaviours which would support Nurses and Midwives to raise concerns in accordance with the NMC Code.
3. Identify the professional responsibility and accountability for raising and escalating concerns in accordance with the NMC Code within all Nursing and Midwifery job descriptions commencing with the Band 8A/8B Lead Nurse, Lead Midwife role.
4. Scope Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust wide processes for raising concerns, logging reported concerns and providing feedback on actions taken.
5. Identify any education, development or support needs required to assist nurses or midwives to fulfil their responsibilities and accountability in relation to raising concerns
6. Identify actions and recommendations to inform Phase 2 of the project.

## **Project Findings**

Questionnaires were distributed to a convenience sample of nurses and midwives undertaking study days at HSC Leadership Centre, HSC Clinical Education Centre and RCN; a total of 330 registrants were surveyed.

Most respondents are aware of the process to raise a concern. Approximately one third of respondents had occasion to raise concerns and the comments they provided indicated that in some cases they felt well supported in the process. However, the qualitative feedback supports the findings within the wider national literature that for a considerable number of nurses and midwives raising concerns remains a difficult process with a significant number expressing unease about how their concerns are received and dealt with.

### ***Standardised Job Description Statements***

Standardised job description statements were developed which aim to provide clarity about the professional responsibility and accountability that is inherent in the role to support staff to raise concerns, and take appropriate action. The statements were shared with the Directors of Human Resources (HR) Forum by their representative on the Steering Group.

### ***Whistleblowing Policies and Procedures***

Whistleblowing policies and procedures for raising concerns at work have been developed by each of the five HSC Trusts which reflect the Department of Health (DoH) (2017) Framework and Model Policy. A variety of processes relating to the provision of training and ongoing education on raising concerns are identified which included engagement with HR. The main method of training is via induction programmes and the training of managers and key staff. A range of methods are identified, across the Trusts, to raise the profile of the Raising Concerns Policy, despite this some respondents to the survey reported that they would appreciate more information and training on the process to raise concerns and on who to contact if they have concerns.

## Conclusions

Nurses and Midwives continue to have anxieties about how their concerns will be received by their managers and colleagues. They do not always believe that action will be taken on their concerns and have not always received feedback related to the concerns that they have raised.

There remains confusion as to how raising a concern differs from whistleblowing and it is important that registrants have clarity as to which mechanism is appropriate when they have concerns.

It is also clear that the findings of this project have relevance for all nurses and midwives regardless of whether they work in the HSC or the Independent Sector.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were agreed through the CNO Business meeting in February 2019: -

### ***Recommendation 1***

Following endorsement of the Job Description Statements HSC Bodies should ensure that they are incorporated into all Nursing and Midwifery Job Descriptions regardless of role. The third statement is specific to Band 8A (and above) roles.

#### *Standardised Job Description Statements*

- The post holder will promote and support effective team working, fostering a culture of openness and transparency.
- The post holder will ensure that they take all concerns raised with them seriously and act in accordance with: The Code (NMC 2018) particularly sections 16 and 17, as well as the Employer's Raising Concerns Policy.
- The post holder will, in the event of a concern being raised with them, ensure that feedback/learning is communicated at individual, team and organisational level (as per HSC Trust policy) regarding concerns and how they were resolved.

As a second phase of this project: -

### ***Recommendation 2***

Adapt and adopt the agreed Job Description Statements for inclusion in all nursing and midwifery job descriptions regardless of grade or role.

### ***Recommendation 3***

In the context of Enabling Professionalism, support the learning and development of nurses and midwives in raising concerns. Specifically resources should be identified which offer support to nurses and midwives involved in the management of concerns once they have been raised or escalated. This will include: -

- extant guidance from the NMC and policies and procedures within the HSC and will align with the outworking of the HSC Leadership Strategy (DoH, 2017) and the NI work on Duty of Candour
- case studies which support registrants to understand when and how to raise concerns.

## References

Department of Health (2017) *HSC Collective Leadership Strategy*. Belfast: DoH.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2015) *Raising Concerns: Guidance for Nurses and Midwives*. London: NMC.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018) *The Code: Professional Standards of Practice and Behaviour for Nurses, Midwives and Nursing Associates*. London: NMC.

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