



## **RCSLT welcomes NHS People Plan aspirations, but says robust plans will be needed to realise them**

The RCSLT has welcomed the publication of England's NHS People Plan, but called for more details on how the aspirations in it will be realised, and more recognition of the valuable contribution of allied health professionals.

While we study the Plan in more depth, there are some things that are immediately welcome. But the limited recognition of the role of allied health professionals, the third largest part of the health and social care workforce, is deeply disappointing – as is the lack of recognition of speech and language therapists, despite the NHS Long Term Plan explicitly stating that we are a profession in short supply.

### **What we welcome**

We were pleased to be involved in discussions on the interim NHS People Plan and welcome:

- the **focus on supporting and caring for staff** - this will help them deliver better care for their patients and the people they work with
- the recognition that **discrimination, violence and bullying have no place** - we look forward to that being translated into concrete action and real, lasting change being effected
- that leaders are expected to **act with kindness** – sadly, this is not always the reality on the ground so we hope strong action will be taken against bullying cultures wherever they are found with robust enforcement
- **additional places** for undergraduates – this will help to secure the future health and social care workforce required to identify and meet people's needs
- the focus on the **funding for continuing professional development** (CPD) and that staff will be released to do that and also to support student placements – this will help deliver better care and also help secure the future workforce the country needs
- the naming of allied health professionals in the **new clinical placements fund** – this is very encouraging
- the **promise around PPE** – while this is welcome, it is not sufficient

### **What we would have liked to see**

#### ***More recognition of the role of allied health professionals***

It is disappointing that the Plan does not give more recognition to the role of allied health professionals in general, and speech and language therapists in particular.

We have a key role to play both in helping people recovering from COVID-19 and those people of all ages who have communication and swallowing needs not related to COVID-19. These needs can be long-term, and sometimes life-long. Without appropriate support from speech and language therapists, neonates, children, young people, adults and the elderly are all at risk of potentially serious negative outcomes.

#### ***Addressing speech and language therapy shortages...***

Given the comments in the NHS Long Term Plan, it is disappointing that the Plan does not set out how speech and language therapy being a shortage profession is going to be addressed.

### ***...including in mental health services***

In its submission to the Migration Advisory Committee's Full Review of the Shortage Occupation List, the Department of Health and Social Care argued that speech and language therapists should be added to the Shortage Occupation List because the profession is facing a range of pressures including increasing demand, in mental health in particular. So while the proposed increase in the mental health workforce is welcome, it is disappointing that there is neither any reference to speech and language therapists being a core part of that workforce, nor how their numbers will be increased in mental health services.

### ***Ensuring access to appropriate PPE***

While it is welcome that the Plan says employers should make sure all their people have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and are trained to use it, it is not sufficient.

We remain deeply concerned about our members' ability to access the appropriate level of personal protective equipment (PPE) to do their jobs safely and reduce the risks to their patients and themselves. This is because the UK Government's PPE guidance does not include all the aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) that speech and language therapists undertake.

### ***Institutional racism and active anti-racism***

We welcome that the Plan recognises the COVID-19 pandemic has been a time of national awakening about social and health inequalities and that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on BAME staff working in the NHS. In that context, we think the Plan could have taken a more active anti-racism stance and been more explicit about how any institutional racism is going to be tackled in the interest of BAME colleagues and BAME communities they serve.

### **Next steps**

We recognise that the publication of the plan is only the beginning of the story. We hope that as implementation of the Plan progresses, more recognition will be given to the central role that allied health professionals play and that measures will be put in place to address our profession being in short supply. If not, people face not having their communication and swallowing needs identified and appropriately supported, both now and in the medium to long term.

We also hope that as soon as possible robust plans to eradicate discrimination, violence and bullying will be developed and implemented so that for our BAME colleagues, and others, and the individuals, families and colleagues they work with and support, the Plan's admirable aspirations don't remain just that – aspirations.

More immediately, we renew our call for the Government's PPE guidance to be amended to list as AGPs the relevant procedures speech and language therapists undertake, in the interests of their patients, their safety and the wider resources of the NHS.