

Care Under Pressure research summary, for senior leaders.

This briefing summarises findings from a decade of NIHR-funded research into the workforce wellbeing of NHS staff, undertaken by researchers at Exeter partnering with four other universities and multiple healthcare settings.

Findings and recommendations

A key finding is that improving staff wellbeing can improve patient experience and reduce costs. The research makes four main recommendations for NHS trusts:

1. **Prioritise improvements in working environments**, instead of wellbeing 'add-on's. These improvements are often relatively simple and inexpensive but, when trusts focus instead on wellbeing activities that do not address the root cause (e.g. tea bag gifts, animal visits, yoga), this can cause additional stress and frustration for healthcare staff (see quote below).
2. **Find ways to involve healthcare staff in creating solutions** to improve wellbeing (e.g. staff consultation, co-design, actively encourage feedback). Too often we found initiatives were designed without input from those affected, so solutions frequently did not address the underlying problem.
3. **Make it easier for healthcare staff to access help** to improve their mental health (e.g. "one stop shop" phone lines, flexible timings to accommodate shift patterns). Currently, when NHS staff experience mental health difficulties, the offer is often confusing and it is hard to access support.
4. **Emphasise relationships and belonging** in designing interventions (e.g. group interventions, huddles, regular informal opportunities for team conversations). Wellbeing worsens when NHS staff feel isolated and unable to do their job.

Although some of the findings and recommendations might seem like 'common sense', our evidence suggests they are not yet embedded in many NHS settings.

"I don't think petting a dog, or a donkey, or a parrot, is going to help with my problems, and I think to try and suggest that it does is embarrassing. I don't want to go to a cake sale, I don't want to have my feet massaged, I just want somebody to make my day-to-day job as efficient and easy as it can be. So, fix the IT, that would help with my wellbeing".

Find out more:



Doctor participant, Care Under Pressure 3 research project.

