

# VERITA

IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INVESTIGATION

## **Ed's welcome**

So we now have a *Sign up to safety movement*. Like many people working in health care, I can't help feeling a little jaded about yet another patient safety initiative – especially as I've never met anyone who didn't want to make services safer. However, what's different about Jeremy Hunt's challenge to NHS trusts to cut avoidable deaths by half is that the focus is on creating a culture of learning and improvement.

Based on Verita's experience of carrying out investigations and reviews, the ability to learn from mistakes is one of the most significant factors in determining what makes an organisation safe.

Verita has designed a diagnostic tool based on this and other characteristics of resilient organisations. The tool helps NHS trusts assess where their weaknesses might lie and prioritise the action they need to take to make services safer. It can be applied across an organisation, within departments or in teams and I believe it can make a big difference to those trust's that accept the secretary for state's challenge to reduce avoidable deaths. Read on for more details.

Best wishes

Ed Marsden

Managing partner

## **Spire governance review**

Verita has carried out a review of Spire Healthcare's response to concerns about a former consultant breast surgeon who had been performing an unregulated procedure and unnecessary operations at two of its hospitals.

Consultant breast surgeon Ian Paterson was employed by the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust and had admitting privileges at Spire Parkway and Spire Little Aston hospitals.

Verita's review examined governance arrangements at both of these Spire hospitals. The report details what the Spire hospitals knew about his clinical practice, when they knew about it and what action they took by way of response. Mr Paterson's patients were also invited to contribute, and their views are included in the report.

It made 15 recommendations designed to prevent future incidents of this nature. Spire Healthcare accepted them all and published the report's executive summary on Tuesday 4 March

<http://www.spirehealthcare.com/about-spire-healthcare/spires-news/spire-welcomes-verita-review-and-recommendations/>

## **Safety first in UAE**

Verita consultants are helping local staff of a new medical clinic in the United Arab Emirates establish safe policies and procedures. The clinic is run by King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

The trust's commercial arm commissioned Verita to make sure that the flagship enterprise's systems, processes and policies are at the forefront of patient-safety thinking and, crucially, can be implemented in line with local culture and behaviour.

Peter Killwick, Verita partner, explains: *"The policies, which have been developed in the UK by the trust's in-house team, need to be carefully tailored to the local environment. Verita is running workshops with the on-site clinical and managerial team in order to translate the policies into concrete actions that will govern the day-to-day behaviour and actions of staff and treatment of patients."*

The workshops will ensure that quality certification can be achieved as early as possible with minimal disruption to staff or significant additional training cost.

## **Resilience assessment pilot**

Verita has developed a patient-safety early–warning tool based on the characteristics of health-care providers that adapt positively to organisational challenges. The organisational resilience assessment tool – ORA - is being piloted in NHS trusts in London and the north of England in April 2014.

Peter Killwick, Verita partner, explains: *“ORA provides a framework to assess the safety of structures, processes, practices and culture within health-care providers. The result offer genuine insight into areas where there is a danger of failure and where intervention might be required, all at a fraction of the time, cost and distress of investigating after a failure has occurred.”*

Verita developed ORA in conjunction with a leading academic from Imperial College. It synthesises the learning from over 150 of Verita’s patient-safety investigations and a review of academic studies of organisational resilience in the UK and abroad.

The process is designed to be quick and engaging for participants. Three groups of trust managers, clinicians and frontline staff will take part in structured workshop covering ten areas identified as the drivers of strong or weak patient-safety performance.

The outputs will provide comparison between the groups, with both ‘hard data’ from answers to questions and ‘soft intelligence’ from debates within the workshop. The entire process will last only two days in each trust, with no individual called upon for more than two to three hours.

## **Wolverhampton whistle-blower**

The NHS Trust Development Authority has asked Verita to review the handling of concerns raised by a whistle-blower at The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust.

The appointment follows allegations made in *The Daily Mail* that a whistle-blower was facing disciplinary action and potential dismissal after raising concerns about the clinical coding department at the trust.

One of Verita's most experienced associates, Lucy Scott-Moncrieff, will lead the work.

## **Learning disabilities**

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust asked Verita to undertake an investigation into the death of Connor Sparrowhawk, a patient at its learning disability service.

The publication of our report attracted media attention from a number of high-profile UK publications including [The Guardian](#), [The Telegraph](#), [Health Service Journal](#) and [The BBC](#).

Our team conducted a comprehensive document review alongside staff interviews. The work was subject to a tight deadline starting in November 2013 and culminating in publication on 25 February 2014.

Verita identified a number of fundamental problems within the service and that the death was preventable. We were able to offer the trust practical solutions in line with best practice standards to mitigate future risks associated with the care of vulnerable adults.

## **CQC warning prompts SI review**

A Care Quality Commission warning notice prompted a trust to commission Verita to review its serious incident investigations.

Project lead Tariq Hussain explains: *“The trust wanted to assure itself and the CQC that it had a robust system in place to investigate serious and critical incidents so that themes could be identified and lessons learned.”*

Verita tested the strength of the trust’s newly introduced incident management policy by benchmarking it against national standards. We also met with senior staff to test their understanding of the policy and the importance of conducting and learning from investigations, and levels of implementation.

We identified a number of ways in which the policy and its implementation could be improved and put forward practical recommendations on how the trust could embed learning from incidents. The CQC warning notice has now been lifted.

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## **Board focus on safety**

Verita has helped a London teaching foundation trust to improve reports to its board on safety and performance issues.

Project lead Amber Sargent explains: *“The trust wanted to be sure that information presented was clear, focused and provided assurance about the quality of care being delivered. Our task was to make it easier and quicker for board members to pinpoint the most important issues.*

*“We worked with trust staff to make the three regular assurance reports much shorter and sharper, reducing the narrative element and focusing on trends, concerns and exceptions. Critically, only information that passed the ‘so what’ test made it to the final version. We also introduced a new way to summarise the reports so they were more about providing assurance and less about describing activity,”* she continues.

Verita reviewed best practice and regulatory requirements in reporting information to the board. We then assessed the three assurance reports against best practice and ran a workshop for staff to agree what assurance means and what the future reports should look like. Verita also met with a non-executive director to get the board’s perspective on information members would like to receive. We then drafted new templates and worked with the leads to help them populate the new templates for the first time.

Feedback from the trust board on the first of the new-style reports has been very positive.

## Complaints know how

Verita launched a new complaints assessment service at the NHS Complaints Conference in February 2014.

The service equips trusts with reliable information about their performance in this key area, helping them prioritise improvements to deliver best practice. It is quick, accessible and based on an innovative diagnostic tool developed by Verita.

Verita senior consultant Amber Sargent explains: *“The diagnostic tool is based on best practice benchmarks that we have developed from our experience of working with trusts to improve complaints handling systems and clear backlogs.*

*“Using a combination of the diagnostic tool, targeted interviews and documentary review we are able to assess the effectiveness of complaints handling against best practice.”*

The assessment takes just two days to complete.

For more information contact Amber Sargent on 020 7494 5670 or email [ambersargent@verita.net](mailto:ambersargent@verita.net).

## **Savile update**

The Department for Education has commissioned Verita to support its investigations into sexual abuse committed by Jimmy Savile at a number of educational institutions including schools and charities.

Lucy Scott-Moncrieff, former president of the Law Society and one of Verita's most experienced associates, will lead the work.

Verita's managing partner Ed Marsden comments: *"Our experience in supporting Kate Lampard in her oversight of the three main NHS investigations at Stoke Mandeville, Broadmoor Hospital and Leeds General Infirmary made Verita the obvious choice for this sensitive and high-profile piece of work.*

*"We have also been asked to oversee a further 19 investigations being carried out by NHS trusts after the Metropolitan Police sent the Department of Health details of new allegations about Jimmy Savile in November last year."*

It is expected that all the Department of Health reports will be published by June 2014.

## **Historical child abuse**

The States of Jersey has appointed Frances Oldham QC to chair its inquiry into historical abuse in children's homes and fostering services on the island.

Verita's managing partner Ed Marsden was part of the three-strong appointment panel alongside Belinda Smith of the NSPCC and Michael de la Haye, the greffier of the states.

Ed Marsden says: *"The States of Jersey came to Verita for advice on how to commission this inquiry into allegations dating back to the 1960s. Being part of the appoint panel felt like completing the circle."*