

NEWS

“Super managers” to be sent into failing hospitals

Jacqui Wise

London

Senior doctors and top industry managers are to be recruited to a new fast track leadership programme as part of a plan to turn round failing NHS hospitals.

These “super managers” will be given a 10 month crash course in how to run hospital trusts and how the NHS works. As part of their training they will take a two month intensive business course at a leading institution, such as Harvard Business School. Graduates of the scheme will be expected to be rapidly promoted to NHS senior managers and chief executives.

England’s health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, made the announcement as part of a new plan to improve poorly performing NHS trusts. After the Keogh review which looked at 14 NHS trusts with high mortality rates, 11 have now been placed in special measures.¹ Hunt said that turning special measures hospitals round was his top priority as health secretary.

Under the plans, each of the 11 failing trusts will be partnered with high performing trusts (see box). The high performing trusts will be reimbursed for their time and could be awarded bonuses, from a pot totalling £5.5m (£6.5m; \$8.8m), if their input produces tangible results. The scheme echoes the “superheads” scheme for schools.

Hunt said, “In place of the old approach of paying management consultants to analyse the problems, we are giving contracts to the best in the NHS to implement solutions they have tried and tested. With the help of inspiring NHS leaders and their teams from our leading hospitals, I am confident that we can get these hospitals out of special measures and on the road to recovery.”

The 11 trusts in special measures must also publish their improvement plan via NHS Choices and update this monthly so that the public can see what progress has been made. Each

of the trusts will also have an improvement director appointed and accountable to either Monitor, if they are a foundation trust, or to the NHS Trust Development Authority.

NHS foundation trusts placed in special measures will have their freedom to operate as an autonomous body suspended, which could mean their losing the freedom to appoint their own executive teams or to set their own operating plans. Trusts will be able to become foundation trusts only if they have achieved good or outstanding ratings from the Care Quality Commission.

But Chris Ham, chief executive of the King’s Fund, said, “Partnership arrangements have the potential to improve performance, but this should not distract the focus of trusts which already provide higher standards of care. The solution is not to parachute in a heroic lone chief executive—successful leadership involves whole teams of doctors, nurses, and managers who are given the time and resources to make a difference.”

Mike Farrar, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, welcomed the announcement. “A key sign of a first-class leader is being open to every opportunity to learn, from above and below, from within the service and outside it. This new programme shows all the signs of building on the best we already have in the NHS and attracting new talent from other industries,” he said.

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1 Kmiotowicz Z. Health secretary puts 11 hospital trusts in England into special measures

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Trusts in special measures (with partnering organisation)

North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust (Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust)
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust (Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)
East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust (Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)
George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust (University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust)
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust)
Tameside Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust)
Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust)
Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust)
Medway NHS Foundation Trust (partner to be confirmed)
Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (partner to be confirmed)
Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (specifically on complaints))