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Covid-19: Trust leaders express concern over levels of fatigue and anxiety among staff

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The mental and physical health of staff will be a major concern for leaders of NHS trusts as they prepare for the next phase of the covid-19 pandemic, a report has concluded.

The report from the NHS Confederation, the body that represents NHS organisations, is based on interviews with 13 chief executives conducted in May and June.¹ It found that trust leaders were concerned about the long term effects that covid-19 could have on the mental and physical health of their staff.

High levels of anxiety and fatigue among staff were reported by all trust leaders, but particularly by those with a high proportion of ethnic minority staff, who felt extremely anxious.

Several chief executives featured in the report said that they had been discussing ways to tackle anxiety among staff with their senior management teams. For example, Steve Russell, chief executive of Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, said his trust had deployed psychologists from within the trust to support staff.

Chief executives also said that many staff were currently working “on adrenaline” and that it would not be long until fatigue set in, which they recognised would cause further challenges.

“As trusts move into the next phase of the covid-19 response, the leaders we spoke to felt it imperative to continue to support staff,” the report said.

Niall Dickson, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said the report highlighted the many positive changes that had come about during the pandemic “which need to be built upon as we step tentatively to a new normal.”

¹ NHS Confederation. The NHS after covid-19: the views of provider trust chief executives. 29 Jul 2020. <https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/5f1ed1c24fef06001aaa7323>.

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