

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

1 SEPTEMBER 2022

STATE OF THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE FOLLOWING COVID-19

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Summary

This report provides an overview of the health and care workforce position following the last two and half years for Medway. This report must be set in the context of the exceptional circumstances that our colleagues have operated within during the global COVID-19 pandemic which started in late 2019. The consequences of this pandemic continue to have a significant impact on the people of Medway, Kent and nationally.

The report provides a summary of the changes in workforce numbers, the impact on the health and wellbeing of our workforce and the work being undertaken to support health and care colleagues.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. Under the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 the Council may review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health service in Medway. The Council has delegated responsibility to the Health and Wellbeing Board to provide collective leadership to improve health and wellbeing across the local authority area.

2. Background

2.1. Working in health and care during the COVID-19 pandemic has been an extraordinary challenging time for our workforce. They have had to respond operationally to the significant demand for treatment and care. This unprecedented occurrence has resulted in backlogs within the system as the demand for health and care services escalated.

- 2.2. We have seen the exceptional effort that colleagues have shown during this time to ensure our patients and citizens remain safe, supported and have access to health and care services in line with their specific needs.
- 2.3. The demand on our workforce remains with ongoing peaks and troughs of need related to the 'pandemic waves' as new Covid variants infect the population. Throughout these periods action is being taken to reduce the backlog for treatment care in the midst of increasing demand for health and care services. This work is challenging given the context of pre-pandemic national and local workforce shortages in Medway in health and care, particularly GPs and domiciliary care providers.

Medway workforce position in health

- 2.4. In Medway, there are 6072 WTE colleagues working in health in the community, the acute hospital and general practice including Primary Care Networks).
- 2.5. The general practice workforce in Medway was 570 whole time equivalent (WTE) in May 2022. This represents a growth of 10.6% since May 2020 which is above the Kent and Medway average of 7.47%. This includes an additional 6 whole time equivalent (WTE) GPs in Medway, a growth of 8.1%, broadly in line with the Kent and Medway average growth (8.7%). 5 GP practices in Medway and a further 5 in Swale have also signed up to the GP attraction offer, a coordinated approach to attracting and incentivising GPs into areas of Kent and Medway where there are lower number of GPs or are areas with higher levels of deprivation.
- 2.6. General practice is changing and there a number of additional professional roles that support GPs to support their communities. The growth in these clinical and professional roles frees up GP's time to focus on patients who need their professional expertise. Since 2020 there are an additional 20 WTE nurses and other additional clinical professionals supporting practices in Medway. Recruitment continues to expand the number of these roles in 2022/23 across Kent and in Medway.
- 2.7. There are 5502 WTE health colleagues working across the community and in the acute hospital (Medway NHS Foundation Trust). Net growth of workforce is lower across the community (7.4%) and the acute hospital trust (6.8%) than the Kent and Medway average of 8.2% and the South East average of 7.8%. An additional 83 WTE registered nurses and 70 WTE doctors are employed now when compared to pre-pandemic. Vacancy levels for the acute hospital trust are in line than most Kent and Medway trusts with an increase in staff turnover in Medway since January 2022 that mirrors the national picture and reflects pre-pandemic levels. Proactive recruitment activities continue including international nurse recruitment and a focus on filling clinical support workers who support the registered staff.
- 2.8. Adult mental health workforce (which is not split by local geography) grew by 6.3% across Kent and Medway. Vacancy levels have increased however

there is a robust recruitment pipeline (circa. 400 WTE) to address current vacancy levels (circa. 500 WTE across Kent and Medway) with turnover is at similar levels to other Trusts.

- 2.9. Covid related sickness absence has continued to be higher in health throughout the pandemic for Medway than the Kent and Medway average. It remains one of the top reasons for sickness absence in health alongside anxiety/stress and depression and musculoskeletal problems. Covid absence has followed trends in the community. Non-covid related sickness absence such as anxiety/stress and depression and musculoskeletal problems was higher during the pandemic but has now returned to pre-pandemic levels and remain two of the highest reasons for sickness absence in Medway, in Kent and Medway and regionally.

Medway care workforce position

- 2.10 Data on the care workforce is captured annually by Skills for Care, was last provided for 2021/22 in October 2021. In Medway, there were 1100 WTE roles across Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulated providers (Care and nursing homes and the home care providers): 48% have part time contracts, 30% of workers were on zero-hour contracts, which is in the top quartile in the South East.
- 2.11 Vacancies were highest in the home care market (7%) and this mirrors the national position. Nationally, filled posts have decreased by 3%. Staff turnover is high within care (30%), particularly within the domiciliary and home care market and this is also the case nationally. Since 70% of leavers remain within the sector, additional recruitment into the sector is low.
- 2.12 Kent and Medway are running an ongoing recruitment campaign with a recruitment portal operating from within the Care Sector, but additional challenges such as the cost of fuel make the domiciliary market difficult to recruit to. The Care Sector can recruit internationally, but sponsored recruitment requires the offer of accommodation for workers which is not always affordable for care providers.
- 2.13 Whilst it is acknowledged that the data on the social care provider workforce relates to 2020/21 (published in October 2021), the challenges faced in domiciliary care have increased in recent times. A weekly Community and Social care call has been in place since last winter 2021 to support a system approach to manage pressures. On the 11th August 2022, the number of people without the needed home care packages was 96. This figure does not include people who are waiting for a package of care to enable them to be discharged from hospital. The number fluctuates but is increasing and has been discussed at the most senior levels of the Council and the ICB. This is driven by current capacity in the homecare market.

Wellbeing supporting activity across health and care

- 2.14 Supporting colleagues throughout the pandemic has been a priority and this support continues. National training and funding has been provided for Trusts to develop and train trauma risk management practitioners, colleagues who were able to spot risks of trauma and provide support to access services. There are 6 colleagues who have completed the practitioner training, with 14 others in the process of training within Medway.
- 2.15 All health and care colleagues have continued to have access to a range of health and wellbeing support. This includes national offers including wellbeing apps, helplines, training, decompression space, access to bereavement and counselling support.
- 2.16 In Kent and Medway all health and care colleagues have access to the Talking Wellness mental health and wellbeing Hub run by Kent and Medway Social Care Partnership NHS Trust which has had 1113 referrals either through direct referrals or through management referrals. A wellbeing bus run by KMPT has also been visiting sites across Kent and Medway to raise awareness to the range of support available and will be running again through winter.
- 2.17 A network of leadership support circle facilitators in Kent and Medway were trained to support leaders throughout the pandemic. The acute Trust has invested in Wellbeing champions that continue to be rolled out across health in Medway and additional wellbeing roles such as mental health first aiders. Mindfulness programmes have been offered and have run in the acute hospital and in primary care in Swale.
- 2.18 In primary care across Kent and Medway managing difficult conversation training for primary care receptionists and administration was delivered. Additional support was offered to care homes for specialised counselling during the height of the pandemic.
- 2.19 Health and wellbeing support remains a priority, there have been a plethora of offers and we will be launching our wellbeing website in October that consolidates the offers into one place for easy access for health and care colleagues.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 Pre-pandemic there were already national and local workforce shortages. Whilst the pandemic has increased the demand on health and care colleagues, in health in Medway there has been some growth in workforce noting turnover is now starting to increase, albeit it back to pre-pandemic levels and in line with national trends.
- 3.2 We know that covering vacancies can also have an impact on colleagues and whilst temporary staff are used to cover these gaps, there has also been some progress in health to recruit to vacancies throughout the pandemic. The

challenges with shortages of domiciliary and home care workers to meet demand remain a significant challenge in Medway but also regionally and nationally.

- 3.3 Covid sickness remains one of the key reasons for absence and continues to follow Covid infection rates in the community. The longer-term impact on the health and wellbeing of colleagues in health and care remains to be seen. Anxiety/stress and depression was already one of the top reasons for sickness absence and remains as this.
- 3.4 There has been a range of wellbeing support put in place for health and these offers have been opened to care colleagues in Kent and Medway. The website will consolidate these offers into one easily accessible place so promotion and ease of access will improve.
- 3.5 Winter will be challenging. The wellbeing of colleagues continues to be a top priority for health and care organisations and monitoring of colleagues needs, wellbeing offers and their impact will continue to ensure we are able to support colleagues.

4. Risk management

4.1 There is one key identified health and wellbeing risk as identified below:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The longer-term impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of colleagues is unknown and remains a risk for health and care organisations	The longer-term impact of the pandemic on health and care colleagues is yet unknown. Colleagues in smaller organisations may have less organisational support to support colleagues	Wellbeing support is being offered to health and care colleagues across Kent and Medway. The wellbeing website being launched in October will consolidate the offers to improve promotion and ease of access.	C2
The lack of resource in the homecare market.	The reduction in staff in the homecare market has led to the council being unable to put packages of care in place for a number of people	Kent and Medway are running an ongoing recruitment campaign with a recruitment portal operating from within the Care Sector.	B2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	that have been assessed as requiring care.	Adult Partnership Commissioning and Adults Brokerage are working with new providers in an attempt to increase capacity	

5. Climate change implications

- 5.1 There are no climate change implications to Medway Council arising directly from this report, although it should be recognised that the ICB approved its environmental strategy during its meeting in July, representing the importance with which it addresses the environmental challenges which we face.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications to Medway Council arising directly from this report.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications to Medway Council arising directly from this report.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to note the update.

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None