

Interim NHS executives' pay 'spiralling out of control'

Temporary managers at 32 worst-performing groups are claiming record rates of up to £400,000 a year

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

TEMPORARY NHS managers brought in by failing health services are being paid record rates of up to £400,000 a year.

Ministers have repeatedly ordered clampdowns on "excessive and indefensible" management pay and have promised extra scrutiny of deals which pay more than the £142,500 salary of the Prime Minister.

But a *Sunday Telegraph* investigation of 32 of the worst-performing clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), which have been put under the direction of NHS England, shows that in fact rates have reached a record high.

The central authority agreed the high pay rates, despite the fact the NHS's own guidance suggests maximum rates of £130,000 for those leading CCGs. The

figures, from NHS annual reports for 2016-17, disclose that 21 managers at the struggling organisations are on rates equal to at least £200,000 a year - including five on more than £300,000. Among the organisations which hired them, just three are no longer deemed to be failing.

The highest rates were paid by Enfield CCG, which hired Mike Seitz as "director of recovery" on rates of £34,000 a month. The sum paid for five months' work is equivalent to an annual salary of £408,000.

At North, East and West Devon, Martin Shield cost more than £90,000 for three months - an annual rate of £375,000 - as "turnaround director."

At Surrey Downs CCG, Antony Collins was on rates of £30,000 a month as "turnaround director" for three months - equal to an annual rate of £360,000.

In Enfield, Mr Seitz was in post for five months, ending last September. He was replaced by another interim boss, Mark Eaton, whose annual rates were £214,000. It came as the organisation drew up plans for swingeing cuts, including refusing to fund hearing aids for all but the most extreme cases. The same organisation paid a third interim manager rates of £2,000 a day for 23 days' work.

Janet Davies, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "Despite all the rhetoric from the Government, executive pay appears to be spiralling out of control at the very moment that nurses' pay is cut year-on-year in real terms. Morale is already low and the widening gap helps to push it towards collapse," she said.

NHS bodies have to secure approval from central authorities if they pay managers rates of more than £600 a day. They are also discouraged from allowing such appointments to carry on beyond six months. But some of those on rates of more than £200,000 a year remained in post for 11 months.

The 32 CCGs were all put under the legal direction of NHS England during 2016-17 because their financial problems or quality of services are so poor that they are deemed to be failing or at risk of failing to perform their basic functions. It comes as NHS battles the worst financial crisis in its history. Ser-

vices across the country are drawing up plans to make £22 billion savings, while waiting lists for routine operations such as hip and knee surgery have reached a 10-year high.

A spokesman for NHS England said: "Since Aug 1 2016 all local health organisations whether under legal directions or not have been operating under new guidance setting out clear, tough controls on the use of interim staff.

"However, there are occasions when it's necessary for such steps to be taken in order for the CCGs to be able to turn around their financial performance."

'Never events' The NHS's life-threatening mistakes

Some 424 "never events", including patients falling out of windows and equipment being left inside bodies during surgery, were recorded by the NHS last year.

The life-threatening mistakes were named as such because they should never happen. But they are being systematically repeated, say campaigners.

NHS data has revealed that doctors operated on the incorrect part of the body 178 times in the 12 months to April.

Surgical swabs were mislaid inside patients after operations 22 times and in two cases broken-off drill bits were

also mislaid. Also among the "never events" during 2016-17 were 18 operations carried out on a patient's wrong knee and, on there were four occasions where doctors actually cut open the wrong patient.

Last night, Vincent Hibbard, whose father died from cancer 13 years after a surgical swab was left in his bowel, told *The Sunday Telegraph* the NHS was "not yet serious" about stamping out failures of patient safety.

Frank Hibbard died in 2014 after doctors finally identified the calcified swab which was "the size of a large grapefruit".
Henry Bodkin

Sunday Telegraph 20 August 2017