

Minister vows to protect NHS whistle-blowers

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

MINISTERS will pledge to clamp down on failing NHS managers and do more to protect whistle-blowers under new plans.

New standards for health service leaders will be set in an attempt to drive out bullying and incompetence.

Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, will today promise to create "a more just culture in the NHS, starting at the top".

And he will say that for too long the NHS has made "morally abhorrent" choices in forcing whistle-blowers to risk their jobs if they want to speak up about safety risks.

In a speech to doctors in London, he will say: "Mistakes should be seen as an opportunity to learn and improve, not a need for cover-up and denial.

"So whistle-blowers are doing the NHS a great service. Someone who has the courage to speak up and put their head above the parapet, should be encouraged and embraced.

"Yet, sadly, all too often, they're ignored, bullied and worse - forced out.

"Making someone choose between the job they love, and speaking the

truth to keep patients safe, is morally abhorrent and operationally foolish. It's an injustice I am determined to end."

NHS watchdogs will be asked to consider how to ensure that all managers working at director level are assessed against an NHS "fit and proper persons' test".

All directors will be asked to meet minimum competency standards, and be offered training where it is needed.

The system will also introduce a central directors' database where information about qualifications and employment history can be easily accessed, to stamp out fraud.

Mr Hancock will tell the Patient Safety and Care Conference: "There's an unspoken bond of trust between the public and NHS. We trust nurses and doctors more than any other profession because we know they'll do everything they can to help us and ensure our loved ones are safe in their care.

"But we can't take that trust for granted. When things go wrong patients and their families deserve openness and honesty.

"Creating a more just culture in the NHS, a more open, honest and trustworthy culture, starts today."

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