

Managers face professional regulation and tighter vetting

28 January 2010 | By [Charlotte Santry](#)



Managers would be regulated for the first time under a proposal being developed by the Department of Health in the wake of safety fears sparked by hospital scandals.

The proposal is expected in a report due next month on the regulation of managers. It is being drawn up by a DH working party led by seconded [NHS North East](#) chief executive [Ian Dalton](#).

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It will also seek to address some of the as yet unpublished findings from the independent inquiry, chaired by Robert Francis QC, into failings at [Mid Staffordshire](#) Foundation Trust.

Some managers believe regulation could raise their prestige but others fear ministers could be tempted to make a kneejerk announcement in the run-up to a general election instead of consulting with the service.

[Managers in Partnership](#) chief executive [Jon Restell](#), who sits on the working party, said: “It’s about giving people the confidence that this is a proper organised profession with standards that are adhered to.”

But he warned: “We need substance to support that, otherwise it could just be a PR stunt. If it’s about fixing Tunbridge Wells or Mid Staffordshire we’re barking up the wrong tree.”

Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence chief executive Harry Cayton, another member of the working party, was unconvinced by the idea.

He said: “Ensuring the performance of NHS managers is a vital part of quality. I’m not sure formal regulation is the best way to achieve it - standards, training, appraisal and accreditation may be a more effective way.”

The idea of regulation for managers was floated in the 2008 [next stage review](#) as a way of preventing “poorly performing leaders from moving on to other NHS organisations inappropriately”.

The review said a full blown system of regulation akin to the General Medical Council would be “disproportionate” but more consideration was needed into whether better safeguards were needed.

The working party is expected to recommend tightening up vetting and recruitment processes, for example through more thorough checking of references.

It is likely to stop short of setting out detailed plans for a new regulatory system, instead making it clear the issue requires attention and recommending further work is carried out into the ways it could be achieved.

[NHS North West](#) chief executive [Mike Farrar](#) encouraged managers to engage in a debate, saying: "It's the public service and we're coming into a general election.

"As a profession we need to ensure we take responsibility for that decision and it's not left to the politicians. This will mean we're not in a situation where people say 'the profession wasn't going to do something about it so we had to'."

He said a system based on minimum standards could boost public confidence in managers. This could focus on minimum accepted qualifications or a more formalised version of the code of conduct, but would need to stretch and support managers as well as dealing with the "bottom end", he said.

A report into alleged [bullying](#) at [NHS East Midlands](#) last October cleared the SHA recommended clear guidance on the behaviour expected of managers and a new, single code of conduct for the DH and regulators.

Management consultant [Derek Mowbray](#) has written a revised code of conduct for managers, which the Institute of Healthcare Management is consulting on from next week.

Professor Mowbray said there was no "science" on which to base a more formal regulation system for managers, which is not the case for clinical groups that are placed on professional registers.

Nursing and Midwifery Council chief executive and registrar Dickon Weir-Hughes approved of the move.

He said: "NHS managers are frequently working in very difficult situations where they've got budgets to manage, waiting lists and all the rest of it.

"I think it would help them if they were regulated and if they had procedures for escalating concerns. They just stand alone right now - they're probably the only group that isn't regulated."

<http://www.hsj.co.uk/news/policy/managers-face-professional-regulation-and-tighter-vetting/5010844.article>

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