



Joint Union Statement on Gloucestershire SubCo Board Decision Announcement 1st March 2018

Unison, Unite the Union and the Royal College of Nursing are appalled that the Board of Gloucestershire Hospitals has chosen to proceed with its plan to transfer 750 of its lowest-paid staff outside the NHS.

In doing so the Board of the Trust has ignored the views of the 900 staff who signed the petition specifically opposing the plan, and the fifteen-page consultation response which was submitted by all three unions outlining in detail the reasons for our opposition:

<https://southwest.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/sites/4/2018/02/Gloucestershire-Hospitals-SubCos-Joint-Union-Consultation-Response.pdf>

The Trust Boards of North Bristol and Royal United Hospitals (RUH) Bath have decided to postpone any decision on transferring staff to subcos. Just yesterday RUH sent a statement to all staff saying “we have listened... after careful consideration and discussion the Board of Directors has agreed that more time and information is needed... not least because we have recently been notified that national changes to Agenda for Change are expected in March and we need to understand any impact this might have.”

It is disappointing that the Board in Gloucestershire did not make the same decision.

The fact that the Trust have only given staff a few hours notice of the only meetings to inform them of today's decision, on a day of predictable adverse weather conditions, is itself outrageous. It is also noticeable that the “SubCo Board decision” statement which was put on the intranet in the last 24 hours is an obvious copy-and-paste of an earlier document and therefore contains confusing factual inaccuracies.

Sadly this is in entirely in keeping with the approach of the Trust throughout this process. Senior management has consciously misled staff by claiming that post-transfer they will be part of the “NHS family” - a meaningless concept which they have invented - to obscure the stark and unavoidable fact that after the transfer **staff will no longer be NHS employees**.

Union officials have been prevented from accessing the hospitals to speak to members, and the Chief Executive Deborah Lee has publicly alleged that it is trade unions, rather than her poorly thought out cost-cutting proposal, which are the cause of staff anxiety.

The recent Trust statement has sought to blame one union, UNISON, for spreading “misinformation”, despite the fact that it is very clear that all three unions have been working closely together and have submitted the staff petition and the consultation response document jointly. We reject any attempt to divide us and misrepresent our positions in this way.

UNISON, Unite and the RCN remain committed to the principle that our members in the Trust applied to work for the NHS, and should be able to continue being employed by the NHS.

We do not accept that the burden of NHS underfunding and poor financial management should be passed on to the cleaners, domestics, porters, CSSD staff and others who do vital work which keeps the hospitals running. These staff are already amongst the lowest-paid in the NHS, and it is unacceptable that they are the ones the Trust is attempting to outsource.

The Trust has given no meaningful assurances about terms and conditions of new starters in the subco, so the creation of a two-tier workforce is now a very real and present danger. This is concerning not just for the Gloucestershire NHS staff of the future, but for the current staff who could soon find themselves working alongside colleagues doing the same job for less money. This will be bad news for morale, for recruitment and for retention, and will make existing staff more vulnerable to possible cuts to their terms and conditions.

We do not have much confidence in the assurances that have been given that transferring staffs' terms and conditions will never change. The manner in which they have conducted themselves to date is not reflective of an employer which ought to be readily trusted.

However even if they are sincere they do not know what their future financial position will be, or even whether the current management will still be in charge of the Trust in a few years time – many senior managers are themselves relatively new and experience shows that senior staff tend to move between jobs more quickly than those they impose ideas like this upon.

If the transfer to subco is to go ahead the only way for transferring staff to be relatively secure is to know that a two-tier workforce will be avoided. This is the model which Northumbria Healthcare Facilities Management has used, and this is the significant compromise which we put to the Trust in our consultation response document. Sadly they have chosen to reject this compromise.

In the coming weeks Unison and Unite will be conducting separate indicative ballots to find out whether staff are willing to take industrial action on this issue. We will work closely together on the questions and the timescales to maximise effectiveness.

The Royal College of Nursing remains opposed to the subco and fully supports our Unison and Unite colleagues.

All three unions will continue to campaign politically against the absurd state of affairs which prevails in the NHS and in tax legislation which leads the management of Trusts in Gloucestershire and elsewhere to even consider options of this sort.

It is regrettable that the option of industrial action is now being considered, but having engaged in the consultation process in good faith, submitted 900 names on a petition and having been effectively ignored, we do not feel that we have any other option. The only alternative would be to accept the outsourcing of hardworking hospital staff and the breakup of the NHS. As long as our members are willing to support us, this is something we are not prepared to do.