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To:

Trust CEOs and Chairs  
CCG Accountable Officers  
Chairs of ICSs and STPs  
Directors of HR

CC:

All NHS trusts comms  
Regional NHS England teams  
Primary care networks

15 June 2020

Dear colleagues

Firstly, we would like to thank you for all that you and your colleagues are doing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic – we sincerely appreciate the continued dedication and commitment of all our NHS colleagues working in organisations across the country in these challenging times.

The impact of COVID-19 on black and minority ethnic (BME) colleagues has been widely reported in the media and is also a key matter for us in relation to NHS staff speaking up. We need to ensure all staff have psychologically safe channels to speak up, and we must listen and act upon what we hear. Sadly, reports of staff being criticised for speaking up are having a chilling effect on the system.

On Wednesday 29 April, Sir Simon Stevens and Amanda Pritchard wrote to you regarding [the second phase of the NHS response to COVID-19](#). The letter stated that a safety and learning culture is vital, and that all staff should feel able to speak up safely, and Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are able to provide an alternative speaking up option. A further [19 May letter](#) from Prerana Issar and Dido Harding reinforced the importance of strong staff networks and [diverse representation in decision making](#).

The National Guardian's Office (NGO) and the national NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) team have been working collaboratively to improve the experience of BME staff across the NHS. Given the impact of COVID-19 on BME staff, the focus on this work is even more important now than ever before.

According to [a Pulse Survey](#) the National Guardian's Office has conducted with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, staff are speaking up on issues such as safety, on

risk assessment, and on the wider impact of COVID-19 on BME staff, but there is still more we can do to improve levels of speaking up.

Freedom to Speak Up has never been more important and we must keep safe speaking up channels available and promoted to those whose voices are not so often heard. One way of doing this is to engage with your Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and equality network leads. In this way you will quickly hear about concerns before they become problems and know whether these are being acted upon without any detriment to staff.

It is vital you are confident that all staff feel free to speak up within your organisation. At local level, we will be supporting WRES experts and Freedom to Speak Up Guardians to work together in partnership so that all staff, and in particular our BME staff, feel safe to speak up, knowing that the right actions will be taken.

We know the most successful and innovative organisations are those that model open and diverse cultures. Organisations that embrace Freedom to Speak Up ([see FTSU Index](#)) and perform better against the WRES indicators, generally appear to have better Care Quality Commission ratings.

Over the coming period, we will be in touch with your organisation regarding the improvements we can make together on this important area. In the meantime, we request that this message is cascaded to all staff in your organisation. Also, please accept once again our personal thanks and support for the remarkable way in which you, and all our staff, have risen to this exceptional health challenge.

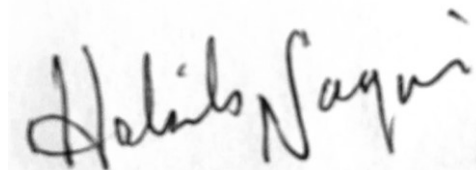
Yours sincerely,

**Dr Henrietta Hughes**



**National Guardian  
Freedom to Speak Up**

**Dr Habib Naqvi**



**Interim Head of Workforce Race Equality  
Standard  
NHS England and NHS Improvement**