



Empathic Healthcare

Improving patient and staff satisfaction in the NHS

Key Policy Recommendation

Add **empathy to all healthcare consultations to boost patient satisfaction and other outcomes, staff wellbeing by 10%** and to **reduce costs**.

The impact of empathic healthcare

1. Adding a dose of empathy into every health consultation **increases patient satisfaction/experience by 10%**, and **reduces the odds of patient complaints by 80%**.
2. Enhancing empathy **reduces practitioner burnout by 50%**, increases compassionate leadership, improves experiences for minority ethnic staff and results in a more resilient and satisfied workforce.
3. Increased empathy **improves medication adherence** by 19%, raises **cellular immunity** of post-operative patients by 14%, reduces patient post-operative pain by 34%, lowers **chronic pain** by 10%, and post-operative morphine use by 50%. Empathy also **lowers** mortality by 40 per cent in diabetic patients.
4. Empathy enhances cost-effectiveness of care and reduces costs on unnecessary drugs.
5. A lack of empathy was a cause of unnecessary deaths at the Mid-Staffs NHS Foundation Trust and the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust – as highlighted in The Ockenden Report and the Francis Report.
6. Empathic care is underpinned by rigorous randomised controlled trials - the same method that determines the effectiveness of all prescription drugs and medical treatments.
7. A focus on empathy is aligned with the [NHS People Plan](#), and the DHSC's areas of research interest ([supporting the health of the future workforce](#)).



The case for empathic healthcare

- NHS patient and staff satisfaction are at an all-time low (36% in the latest British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, the lowest rate since 1997)
- The NHS staff leaver rate has increased from 9.6% in 2020 to 12.5% in 2022.
- NHS vacancies were at 133,446 in September 2022 (9.7%); up from 7.9% in 2021.

Overall satisfaction with the NHS dropped by 17% in 2022

(The largest drop in the history of the British Social Attitudes Survey)

- A broad range of scientific studies have demonstrated that enhancing empathy in healthcare improves patient and practitioner satisfaction.
- The UK is operating in a tight fiscal environment. The need for low cost, evidence-based solutions are paramount.

1 in 3 NHS staff reported feeling 'burned out' (NHS Staff Survey)

New evidence-based empathy training course for healthcare practitioners developed by Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare has raised patient and practitioner satisfaction by 10%.

New system empathy workshop for organisations has increased patient and staff satisfaction in the hospitals, with the lowest satisfaction scores raised by a further 10%.

Evidence base

Funded by Sir Will Adderley, The Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare was officially launched in April 2023 by Prof Sir Jonathan Van Tam. It has developed two pioneering programmes to embed empathy into healthcare organisations and patient consultations:

1. Evidence-based empathy training for practitioners.

This teaches practitioners to enhance empathy in their practice. It includes live and virtual events based on the latest research that underpins empathic care. This can be **rapidly scaled** up and delivered to reach thousands of practitioners across the UK via a '**train the trainer bootcamp**'.

2. Evidence-based leadership training for organisational change

System level empathy training improves empathy at an organisational level through outcome-focused culture change workshops. It is delivered in person with senior leaders and stakeholders in health settings (GP practices, hospitals, healthcare providers), with proven effectiveness.

In delivering its proven impacts, system-level empathy also improves **compassionate leadership**, and **teamwork** ('interprofessionalism'). To scale this, the 5% of hospitals with the lowest patient and staff satisfaction could be dramatically improved, again using a 'train the trainer' bootcamp.

Implementation

1. **Training practitioners:** led by Professor Howick, the Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare will deliver 5 empathy training sessions to 100 practitioners each (total 500 practitioners).

This will enable effective scoping of the programme and raise the profile of its many benefits with practitioners.

2. **Train the trainers bootcamp (for training practitioners, two bootcamps):** Based on performance at the practitioner training sessions (1), 200 practitioners will be selected and trained to train practitioners (this will happen in two waves of 50 then 150 practitioners). These teachers will then deliver 10 training sessions (100 practitioners/session). A total of 200,000 practitioners will be trained, a substantial proportion of the workforce and will lead to deep cultural change.

This will enable the programme to be significantly upscaled and rolled out more widely.



3. **System empathy workshop:** led by Professor Howick, the Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare will deliver 5 system empathy workshops to hospitals that fall within the lowest 5% for patient and practitioner satisfaction.

This will target delivery of the programme to produce the most beneficial outcomes.

4. **Train the trainers bootcamp (system empathy training):** Based on performance at the practitioner training sessions (see (1)), 12 practitioners will be selected to be trained to deliver system empathy training. These newly trained practitioners will then deliver 12 system empathy workshops. This will cover at least the bottom 5% (n=134) of hospitals in patient satisfaction. This represents a substantial proportion of the workforce and will suffice for deep cultural change.

This will bring together the closely linked areas of empathy, safety and staff retention, effecting deep cultural change.

This policy briefing paper was produced by Prof. Jeremy Howick, Professor of Empathic Healthcare and Director of the Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare with the support of the University of Leicester Institute for Policy.



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