

Case for Direct Award to the College of Paramedics to deliver the Paramedic Mental Health and Wellbeing Interventions.

Health Education England [HEE] believe that the College of Paramedics is the only organisation capable of delivering the specific requirements of the Paramedic Mental Health and Wellbeing Interventions. The College of Paramedics is the only supplier with the requisite expertise, experience, access and influence to assist HEE in addressing those urgent needs outlined in the deliverables and actions of NHS policy including the Long-Term Plan, Lord Carter Report, People Plan and NHS Mental Wellbeing Commission. In particular and relevant to this case:

There is an identified increased risk of suicide amongst male Paramedics, with this group of staff being 75% more likely to die by suicide than other occupational groups, the highest amongst all Allied Health Professions. It is acknowledged that the rate is not as high as that for female nurses. Paramedics in ambulance trusts have a higher incidence of sickness absence due to mental health related issues, with a Guardian article in 2019 citing a significant increase (186% between 2011 – 2019) in sickness absence due to anxiety, stress, depression and other psychiatric illnesses.

Paramedics also have a higher rate of referral and self-referral to HCPC for fitness to practice concerns and The Carter report (27 September 2018) detailed concern regarding the recruitment and retention of the ambulance workforce. Retention of Paramedics is of significant concern, with the average age of people leaving the profession being 42, indicating potential 'burnout' of these individuals. There is an abundance of evidence supporting the fact that there are issues with mental health and wellbeing of staff in ambulance services.

In May 2020, the Chief Allied Health Professions officer for England, commissioned a piece of work to develop a framework for best practice. The aim of this work was to reduce the risk of suicide in Paramedics. The framework for best practice identified various elements that will support the health and wellbeing of paramedics and the wider ambulance sector staff. It has been identified that there is a gap focusing on supporting the provision on 2 elements: a) Preparing the future workforce, and, b) Enhanced support for early career paramedics and frontline staff.

In addition to ensuring student paramedics and newly qualified paramedics are supported to understand the potential mental health impact the role may have on them. It is equally important to ensure Paramedics undertaking practice educator roles have this understanding and can identify and support those students that may be struggling with their mental health.

HEE believes that it is highly unlikely for any other supplier to be able to provide the following skills/tools provided by the College of Paramedics as a supplier for the following reasons:

1. The College of Paramedics is the only professional body for paramedics in the UK.

2. The College of Paramedics is a non – profit organisation with over 20 years' experience in providing analysis, guidance and policy influence in paramedics.
3. The College of Paramedics are international thought leaders contributing to innovation and ground-breaking professional developments for Paramedics.
4. The College of Paramedics are responsible for producing the Paramedic Curriculum Guidance used by UK HEIs to set the Paramedic Science curricula.
5. College of Paramedics publish the Paramedics Standards of Proficiency.
6. The College of Paramedics have a comprehensive portfolio of knowledge, experience, and credibility in supporting change in paramedics.
7. The College of Paramedics have a comprehensive portfolio of knowledge, experience, and credibility in mental health support for their members as the professional body for paramedics in the UK

The intention of the direct award is to:

Implement evidence based preventative solutions designed to equip paramedics with the prevention skills that are available to address poor mental health and improve wellbeing in the early career paramedic workforce. Interventions could include educational solutions such as changes to the paramedic undergraduate curriculum.

If the College of Paramedics are unable to provide dedicated interventions to address the issues, there will be a detrimental impact on NHS service delivery for several reasons:

- There will increasingly become a more unstable workforce in ambulance services as workforce remain vulnerable to poor mental health and wellbeing with higher turnover of staff and higher sickness absences.
- Individuals will be left at risk of suicide and mental health conditions putting workforce welfare and patient care at risk.
- HEE investment in undergraduate training is not maximised as attrition within education and training programmes and in early career roles increases.

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