

Strengthening NHS management: A legal perspective on new proposals to enhance patient safety and professionalism

14 August 2025  Hannah McNulty

The UK government has recently unveiled a series of proposals aimed at reforming the management structure within the NHS.

These proposals, published by the Department of Health and Social Care in July 2025, seek to introduce a regulatory framework for NHS managers akin to those existing for clinical professionals, such as doctors and nurses.

This initiative could potentially mark a significant shift in how NHS management misconduct is handled, aiming to bolster patient safety and organisational transparency.

Legal framework and proposals

Under the new proposals, NHS managers found guilty of serious misconduct will face stringent measures including a potential ban from holding senior NHS roles. This move is part of a broader government strategy to professionalise NHS management, ensuring leaders who fail to uphold professional standards are held accountable.

The proposed statutory barring system specifically targets board-level directors and their direct reports within NHS bodies. Further legislation will empower the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to disbar senior NHS leaders who engage in serious misconduct.

This represents a significant step towards aligning the accountability mechanisms of NHS managers with those of clinical staff, thereby fostering a uniform standard of conduct across the health service.

Protection for whistleblowers

A pivotal aspect of the proposals is the enhanced protection for whistleblowers. The government's stance underscores a commitment to fostering a culture of openness and honesty within the NHS.

By safeguarding whistleblowers and ensuring that those who attempt to silence them are barred from NHS leadership, the proposals aim to encourage staff to report wrongdoing without fear of reprisal.

Regulatory and professional standards

The introduction of separate NHS England professional standards for managers is another cornerstone of the proposals. These standards are intended to establish a consistent, national set of expectations concerning management and leadership competency and conduct.

This move, coupled with the creation of a new college of executive and clinical leadership, is designed to attract, develop, and retain top leadership talent within the NHS.

Future implications

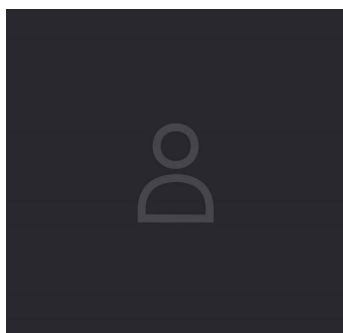
As legislation is introduced and the regulatory framework takes shape, the legal implications and operational impacts of these changes will become clearer. It will be essential for NHS boards and managers to stay informed of these developments to navigate the new standards and ensure compliance.

In anticipation of the proposals being implemented, organisations should take proactive steps including:

- Updating disciplinary policies.
- Updating Freedom to Speak Up policies.
- Conducting swift and fair investigations, with clear consequences and accountability where allegations of misconduct are upheld.
- Updating training content.

More broadly, [NHS organisations](#) should continue to foster an environment where voices are heard, concerns are taken seriously and the implications of falling below the expected standards is made clear to managers.

Contact



Hannah McNulty

Associate

hannah.mcnulty@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)330 045 1312

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