



17<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Earlier in the year a study by the University of Exeter, the University of Surrey, and the Working Party on Sexual Misconduct in Surgery, found nearly two-thirds of women surgeons in the NHS said they had been the target of sexual harassment in the past five years.

We're writing to share the commitments that UHL has made recently in relation to sexual safety for all staff.

In September, UHL signed up to NHS England's Sexual Safety Charter <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/sexual-safety-in-healthcare-organisational-charter>. The charter, which was co-created with those with lived experience and trade union colleagues, is a 10-point agreement that includes pledges to provide staff with clear reporting mechanisms, training, and support by July 2024.

More recently UHL have also signed the BMA pledge to end sexism in medicine <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/equality-and-diversity-guidance/gender-equality-in-medicine/a-joint-pledge-to-end-sexism-in-medicine>. This pledge sets out 10 goals which underpin the cultural and structural factors that cause sexism, in order to improve working conditions for medical students and doctors.

Signing these pledges is a clear commitment to eradicating all forms of sexual misconduct, violence, harassment or abuse at UHL, and to providing more support to colleagues and patients who have been the target of inappropriate behaviour. We know this will be a big task, so a working group has been formed to translate these pledges from words into meaningful action. You will hear more about its work over the next six months.

We would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that there has been a new question added to the NHS Staff Survey this year which asks: "In the last 12 months, how many times have you been the target of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace? This may include offensive or inappropriate sexualised conversation (including jokes), touching or assault."

This question, alongside other data being collected around sexual safety, will help in identifying specific areas where we may have problems in relation to inappropriate behaviours and sexual safety within UHL, and as such will inform plans for action. Completion rates for the staff survey are relatively low for Medical and Dental Staff which means your voice will be less well represented. We encourage you to complete the survey and provide feedback on the important topics it covers. Please consider helping the Trust gather meaningful data on this incredibly important issue. You can do this by searching your UHL emails for "Staff Survey 2023", completion is anonymous, takes 15 mins and the deadline for completion is Nov 24<sup>th</sup>.

If you have experienced sexual harassment or assault, it's important that you speak to someone you feel comfortable with. Victims of sexual harassment and assault can find speaking up difficult or it could feel impossible. You may be fearful of the consequences – to your personal safety or to your reputation. You may not know who to trust. You may feel ashamed of what happened and therefore stay silent.

If you have experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour, sexual harassment or assault there are many different services and charities that you can speak to, but we would like to highlight the following as safe and confidential spaces to talk about what has happened, no matter how trivial or serious you may think the unwanted behaviour was:

- The **Guardian Service** (Freedom to Speak Up) is our free, confidential and independent freedom to speak up service. Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, they can listen and provide expert guidance on the options available to you. Call 0333 733 5488 or email [contact@theguardianservice.co.uk](mailto:contact@theguardianservice.co.uk).
- **AMICA** offers high-quality, confidential counselling and psychological support services to staff. Call 0116 254 4388 or complete the contact form on the following site <https://www.amica-counselling.uk/contact-us/> to refer yourself to their friendly and non-judgmental team.
- Rape Crisis England and Wales (0808 500 2222)
- Safeline (01926 402 498)
- Survivors UK (a UK organisation focused on helping males who have been the victims of sexual assault) ([SurvivorsUK.org](http://SurvivorsUK.org))
- Surviving in Scrubs [www.survivinginscrubs.co.uk](http://www.survivinginscrubs.co.uk) (@ScrubSurvivors)

Sexual assault is a crime. If you have been the target of sexual assault you are encouraged to report this to the police. This can be difficult and is your decision, but if you choose to, the above services can support you in contacting the police.

Colleagues and friends who hear the victims' stories or witness these behaviours may not know what to say or do. If you witness behaviour which you know is not appropriate or a colleague confides in you about their experience of sexual harassment or assault, it is important that you show support. For advice on how you can do this see "Together for Sexual Safety" on UHLs INsite pages <http://insite.xuhl-tr.nhs.uk/homepage/health-and-wellbeing/sexual-safety>

UHL is committed to eradicating sexism, misogyny and sexual violence in the workplace. By signing up to the Sexual Safety Charter and BMA Pledge, UHL has promised to implement actions swiftly to put the welfare of our staff foremost. If you have experienced any of these behaviours please speak up if you can. Let's break the silence, together, for Sexual Safety.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Kirsten Boyle, Consultant Colorectal Surgeon

Dr Clare Collins, Consultant Anaesthetist and Associate Medical Director

Dr Kath Higgins, Consultant in Diabetes Medicine