

## Mental Health Champions in acute paediatric settings

### A joined-up approach to supporting children and young people with mental health needs

While most children and young people will receive care in community settings, there are occasions where attendance or admission to a paediatric or adult acute setting may indeed be the best clinically appropriate option.

The commitments outlined in the [NHS Long Term Plan \(LTP\)](#) make clear that achieving parity of esteem – valuing mental health equally with physical health – is a key priority, though we acknowledge there is still some way to go in meeting this challenge. For services to be delivered effectively and for patients to feel supported and staff to feel confident, we need to facilitate better integration of physical and mental health for children and young people.

NHS England established a shared programme of work across national teams to understand how we can best provide support to the system to provide safe, compassionate and appropriate care for patients. We are also striving to ensure that the paediatric workforce is trained and supported when caring for children and young people presenting to hospital with acute mental health needs, and that the workforce understands where to get additional help, should they need it.

We have co-developed a [framework for systems](#) with associated resources - including a dedicated [e-learning platform](#) - in collaboration with Royal Colleges, professional bodies, national, regional, local system colleagues, children and young people and their parents/carers, with a view to continue to support transforming pathways of care, whilst ensuring services work together to provide a holistic approach for children and young people with physical health needs, mental health needs, or both.

### The importance of the Mental Health Champion

While areas of excellent practice exist, a recent National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death (NCEPOD) report<sup>1</sup> found that mental health care is not given the same level of importance as physical health care for young people in general hospitals across the UK.

Given the increase in number and acuity of mental health problems among children and young people, it is inevitable that paediatricians and nurses will be caring for children and young people with a range of mental health difficulties in their setting. As part of trialling 'what works' for children and young people with mental health needs in acute paediatric settings, some areas have established 'Mental Health Champion' roles – previously referred to as 'mental health/physical health clinical leads' - to ensure that there is designated time within each provider to facilitate the cultural change required for parity of esteem for mental health in the acute setting and to develop staff and ensure children and young people and their families/carers receive appropriate care.

These Mental Health Champion roles have long been advocated for by NCEPOD, RCPCH and others, and have existing equivalents in other paediatric priority areas, such as the named Safeguarding Lead and Diabetes Clinical Lead. They are not intended to provide a greater share of clinical care but to carve dedicated space for a lead professional to drive vital work forward around:

- Facilitating improvements in joint working across their trust and wider system
- Increasing the confidence of their colleagues in supporting these children and young people and their families/carers, through sourcing, signposting and supporting training and education opportunities, and ensuring clear pathways are in place across teams
- Improving the experience of children and young people and their families/carers

As well as advocating for mental health across paediatrics, the individual should help facilitate join-up between CAMHS, mental health liaison teams, mental health nurses, learning disability and autism services, and other key partners.

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<sup>1</sup> National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcomes and Death (2019). *Mental healthcare in young people and young adults*.

We have co-developed four key functions for the role with RCPCH colleagues:

<p><b>Build team confidence and morale across the department</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departmental case-based discussions, debriefing around complex and challenging cases, and mental health support for staff</li> <li>• Providing peer supervision and shadowing opportunities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Encourage uptake of training</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring staff within the department are trained in mental health first aid</li> <li>• Integrating education opportunities with children and young people's mental health colleagues wherever possible to enhance the learning and strengthen working relationships</li> <li>• Advocating for access to and availability of appropriate training in recognising and supporting the mental health needs of children and young people</li> <li>• Dissemination of relevant external learning by staff members across the department</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilitate joint working across mental health and physical health</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with paediatric clinical leads and executive leadership to encourage 'parity of esteem'</li> <li>• Working with children and young people's mental health clinicians to support the provision of physical healthcare in mental health settings</li> <li>• Building supportive and collaborative relationships with colleagues in local children and young people's mental health teams and with local authority services, such as social services. This would facilitate joint assessment and management of children and young people presenting to paediatric services with mental health needs.</li> <li>• Networking with others in similar roles across local systems, regionally and nationally, to enhance dissemination of information from NHSE, Royal Colleges and professional bodies; sharing of good practice and feedback 'from the ground' to facilitate problem solving and further development nationally</li> <li>• As needed, working with NHS provider trusts of children and young people's mental health care and Provider Collaboratives to develop new pathways for children and young people; this may include the development of admission and discharge pathways and supporting joint escalation policies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Provide leadership and link into trust governance structures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencing departmental attitudes, clinical pathways for children and young people, and education programmes for medical/nursing staff</li> <li>• Working cohesively with the clinical director of paediatric services and the paediatric ward matron or children's nursing lead</li> <li>• Linking into wider ICB and wider trust governance structures, including mental health and Provider Collaborative governance structures</li> </ul>

NHS England are funding regions and systems to **establish at least one Mental Health Champion in each provider that admits children and young people by Autumn 2023/24**. These roles will be held by a senior clinician who can admit children and young people to a paediatric ward, and/or who holds clinical responsibility for children and young people in acute settings, in each provider that admits paediatric patients. This is likely to be a **paediatrician, senior paediatric nurse, or senior paediatric allied health professional**. We recommend an allocation of **1 PA per week** as a minimum.

**If you work in a provider that admits children and young people, please keep an eye out for this role being advertised through your typical local channels in the coming months**

We would also encourage you to flag your interest with your manager and to share this document to help them understand the importance and expectations of this role

Thank you,

**NHS England's Children and Young People's Transformation and Children and Young People's Mental Health Programme Teams**