



Health & Care  
**Women Leaders Network**  
Delivered by NHS Confederation and NHS Employers

# *#WonderfulWomenDo*

Brave, compassionate, confident, kind:  
succeeding as a woman in health and care

NHS CONFEDERATION



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## A report by the Health & Care Women Leaders Network, delivered by the NHS Confederation and NHS Employers

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### **Health & Care Women Leaders Network**

The Health & Care Women Leaders Network is delivered by NHS Confederation and NHS Employers.

We are a free network for women working across health and care. We connect through events, masterclasses and tweet chats, and share learning through podcasts, blogs, videos and key reports.

The network celebrates skills and talents, and helps members to connect with colleagues through mentoring and sharing best practice.

#### **The network's priorities are:**

- eliminating the gender pay gap
- seeing more women appointed to senior roles
- increasing flexible working
- addressing bullying and harassment and sexual discrimination experienced in the workplace.

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## Foreword

**Sam Allen**, Chair, Health & Care Women Leaders Network;  
Chief executive, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

At a time when we are faced with relentless negativity in the media – whether in newspapers, on television, or online – and often in relation to the NHS, it can seem almost impossible to find a ray of hope. There is much to improve, and quite rightly, reporting focuses on this, but at times, this can overshadow the tireless commitment of those working in the NHS and social care.

Day in and day out, our wonderful staff get up, return and offer people the best care possible. This is despite enormous pressure, with each day bringing a fresh challenge.

Our greatest asset is our people, but we know these are in short supply. With 100,000 vacancies across the NHS, it is more important than ever that we retain the staff we have, by supporting them and shaping a lasting culture of compassion, kindness and inclusivity.



It was with this ambition that a group of women working across the NHS and social care gathered to share ideas and insight. It was from this group, inspired by Yvonne Coghill CBE (featured below), that the concept emerged for a campaign to celebrate the many wonderful women working across health and care.

This report is the first step. In it, we take a moment to reflect on the positive – on some of the successes in health and care. Answering a set of five questions, a number of senior women leaders across healthcare provided insights on the incredible efforts already being made among women in health and care, for those they serve and for each other.



Through their wisdom and experience, the aim is to shine a spotlight on some of the good news coming from health and care, and also to show that outmoded gender stereotypes do not belong in our workplace. It should be clear to everyone working in health and care that they can share both successes and failures, and that they will be equipped not merely to survive, but to thrive.

I am extremely grateful to the women who responded: their insights are invaluable. I believe they will be applicable to both health and care, and indeed, to all who work across the sector.

The wider campaign will highlight how women in health and care can, and already do, lift up and support those around them, as well as helping to break down the barriers to true equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

Whatever your role in health and care, it's important to appreciate those that have inspired you and made an impact. Let's celebrate our differences, and uncover the amazing things so many do each day that go unseen. If we can get this right, we stand a better chance of retaining our workforce, and achieving the ambition of the interim People Plan of making the NHS the best place work.

You can get involved in our campaign using the hashtag **#WonderfulWomenDo**. Use it to share your stories of the ways the women you have worked within health and care have helped you to get where you are today, thank them for their support, and share your own tips and best practice for supporting women. You can also tag the person or people who have helped you, and do feel free to encourage all colleagues to join in as well – whatever their gender!

## Who's who

**Sam Allen, chief executive, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust; chair, Health & Care Women Leaders Network**



Sam Allen became chief executive of Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in March 2017. As a leadership fellow at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, she takes an active role in influencing culture and leadership development across the NHS.

**Prerana Issar, chief people officer, NHS England/Improvement**



Prerana Issar became chief people officer in April 2019. She was previously director of public-private partnerships at the United Nations World Food Programme.

**Marie Gabriel CBE, chair, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust**



Marie Gabriel was appointed as the chair of East London NHS Foundation Trust in January 2019. She is a member of the workforce race equality standard advisory group and chair of the London mental health trust chairs group.

**Yvonne Ormston, chief executive, Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust**



Yvonne Ormston joined Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust in March 2019. She previously worked at the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), where she was the chief executive for more than four years.

**Yvonne Coghill CBE JP, director, Workforce Race Equality Standard, NHS England/Improvement**



Yvonne Coghill is a trained nurse, with qualifications in mental health nursing and health visiting. She is a member of the equality and diversity council at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in the US.

**Andrea Sutcliffe CBE, chief executive and registrar, Nursing and Midwifery Council**



Andrea Sutcliffe took up her role at the NMC in January 2019. She has more than 30 years' experience in health and social care and was previously chief inspector of adult social care at the Care Quality Commission.

**Dr Henrietta Hughes, national guardian for the NHS**

Henrietta Hughes has been the national guardian for the NHS since 2016. She was previously medical director for NHS England.



**Dame Marianne Griffiths, chief executive, Western Sussex Hospitals**

Dame Marianne Griffiths is celebrating her eleventh year as chief executive of Western Sussex Hospitals. She has led the trust since its creation from a merger in 2009.



**Dr Nikita Kanani, primary care medical director, NHS England/Improvement**

Alongside her NHS England/Improvement role, Nikita Kanani is a GP in south-east London. Before joining NHS England, she was chief clinical officer of NHS Bexley Clinical Commissioning Group.



**Dr Navina Evans, chief executive, East London Foundation Trust**

Navina Evans is a psychiatrist by training. She has been clinical director, chief operating officer and deputy chief executive, and became chief executive of ELFT in 2016.



**Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive, NHS Providers**

Saffron Cordery has been at NHS Providers since 2012. She has previously held roles at the Foundation Trust Network and the Local Government Association. She holds a BA in modern languages.



**Tracie Jolliff, national director of Inclusion, NHS Leadership Academy**

Tracie Jolliff joined the NHS Leadership Academy in 2013. She is an executive coach and has spoken and lectured on leadership and inclusion nationally, working with government representatives and other bodies to address these themes in the public sector.



**Cara Charles-Barks MBE, chief executive, Salisbury NHS Foundation**

Cara Charles-Barks was born and raised in Australia. She qualified as a registered nurse in 1991. Before coming to Salisbury, she was deputy chief executive and chief operating officer at Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust.





**Dr Sara Munro, chief executive, Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust**

Sara Munro was appointed to the post of CEO in 2016. She began her career in the NHS as a student nurse and agency nursing assistant. She is a registered mental health nurse.



**Siobhan Harrington, chief executive, Whittington Health NHS Trust**

Siobhan Harrington became chief executive of Whittington Health in September 2017. Before that, she had been deputy chief executive and director of strategy at the trust. She is a nurse by background.



**Suzanne Tracey, chief executive, Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust**

Suzanne Tracey is a qualified accountant. Under a collaborative agreement, agreed by the boards of the Royal Devon and Exeter and the Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust, she became chief executive of both trusts in June 2018.



**Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE, chief midwifery officer, NHS England/Improvement**

Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent began working for NHS England in 2015. She is also national champion for maternity safety and was previously director of midwifery and divisional director of nursing (women's and children's) at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.



**Dame Jackie Daniel, chief executive, the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Dame Jackie Daniel took up her current role in March 2018. She joined from the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust. She began her career as a nurse before moving into NHS management.



**Angela Hillery, chief executive, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

Angela Hillery has worked within the NHS for more than 30 years and has held a variety of leadership positions. This includes director of operations (north) at NHFT. She was made interim chief executive in May 2013 and took on the role permanently in September 2013.



**Dr Layla McCay, Director of International Relations, NHS Confederation**

Layla McCay is a qualified psychiatrist and is the founder of the Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health. She joined the NHS Confederation in May 2018.



**Dr Liz Mear, Chief Executive, The Innovation Agency – the Academic Health Science Network for the North West Coast**

Liz Mear was chief executive of the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust and has been a director in an acute NHS Trust, a mental health NHS foundation trust and an ambulance trust. She has also worked in local government and as a senior management consultant.



## Introduction

It is widely known that women make up more than three-quarters of the NHS workforce, yet just 34 per cent of NHS boards have true gender parity.<sup>1</sup> Part of the work of the Health & Care Women Leaders Network, which is delivered by the NHS Confederation and NHS Employers, is to help redress this balance, by encouraging all women to support each other in the workplace and to 'lift as they climb', which was the theme of the network's 2018 conference.

Here, we demonstrate how women are already supporting each other and how changes can be made to encourage this across health and care.

A number of senior women working in and with the NHS speak candidly about their own journeys within the health service and how some of the women they have known and worked with helped them to reach their current positions.

## They were each asked five questions:

1. Why are you supporting this campaign (hopes/aspirations)?
2. What impact are you hoping it achieves?
3. What do you love about the NHS?
4. What do you want to change across the NHS and why?
5. What would you tell your younger self if were starting a career in the NHS today?

In their answers, they share their observations on the successes of the NHS, and also where there is room for improvement. They describe how women can continue to support each other and all those around them, and they also help to debunk the belief that it is more often the case that women do not help each other to succeed. It may sometimes be true that women do not support each other, but these answers demonstrate it is not the norm.

Their answers paint a clear picture: there is appetite for change among the senior women in health and care, and a strong sense that this change is achievable with the right action. Women have the power to make that change: to support each other and make workplaces more inclusive, and in doing so, to lead systemic change across the NHS. These changes will not be structural, but they will lead to a more inclusive and compassionate culture.

## Insights from senior women in healthcare

There are several important lessons we can take from the insights provided, not only on how women can and do support each other to succeed, but on how all staff can do so and in turn, how this can promote greater equality across the service.

### Having the right support

The respondents agree that people are what makes health and social care what it is, and having the right support for them, whatever their aspirations and whatever their gender, is absolutely paramount. That includes making sure women are valued and supported, by each other and by all those around them.

### Collaboration and strong relationships

The responses emphasise the idea that no one is an island: collaboration and building strong professional relationships cannot be overlooked. It is through this that learning and best practice can be shared, and that staff can be given the boost they may need to move forward and thrive at work. This can also be applied at a higher level: organisations should be sharing their learning to make sure the whole service can benefit.

### Confidence and bravery

For women just beginning their journeys, it's clear how important confidence can be. The most common piece of advice the respondents would give their younger selves is be more self-assured – whether to stand up for themselves in the face of mistreatment, to have the confidence to go after opportunities, to feel free to be themselves or to believe in their own worth. This also encompasses the ability to be humble: to accept failings, face up to them, ask for help and support each other to learn from them.

## Knowing what success looks like to the individual

Of course, success does not necessarily mean reaching the very highest echelons of seniority. It's also important that women, and indeed all staff, are supported to define and articulate what success looks like to them, so that they are given the right support, at the right time.

As one of the largest workforces in the world, the value and power of the different voices within health and care must be recognised. Research has already shown that diversity and, perhaps more importantly, inclusivity help to improve patient outcomes<sup>2</sup>. Many of the respondents drew a link between this and the importance of gender equality, and stressed that inclusion is vital for staff, patients and communities.

## Compassion and kindness

Alongside passion and dedication to the work, compassion and kindness are also key – not just for patients and service users, but for fellow staff. The respondents agree that remembering we are all human is essential. By caring for and supporting everyone equally, taking the time to listen to them and act on what they say, whatever their gender, staff will be better equipped to care for patients and service users, who must always be at the heart of our work.

## Hope for the future

These insights also demonstrate how valuable hope can be: just as negativity can fuel its own growth, so too can positivity. This is a vital part of the *#WonderfulWomenDo* campaign: to celebrate the ways in which women offer support, and also to give them hope for the future of the sector and their place in it.

We now await the publication of the full NHS People Plan, which includes ambitions to grow the workforce, further embrace diversity, and invest in future talent. The widespread acknowledgement of the need for transformation is heartening; now is the time to strive for positive change.

<sup>2</sup>Obstacles to “race equality” in the English National Health Service: Insights from the healthcare commissioning arena (S Salway et al, 2016)

**Sam Allen**, Chair, Health & Care Women Leaders Network; Chief executive, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust



As chair of the network and chief executive of an NHS foundation trust, Sam Allen is uniquely placed to take a bird's-eye view of the ways in which women work together and support each other across the NHS, whether on the front lines of health and care or at the very highest levels.

She views the health service as “the eighth wonder of the world”, and believes it is the people that make it what it is.

***“We need to nurture and care for the NHS. This means looking after each other, because if we can't do that, how can we care for others?”***

Sam said. “With so many obstacles on the path to gender equality and an inclusive workplace, we mustn't get in the way of one another.”

This means inspiring each other to grow, rather than focusing solely on how to get ahead: no one should feel alone, according to Sam.

“I want to share our learning and help [everyone] to achieve their aspirations. We can also celebrate their contribution to the NHS, inspire them to share their successes with each other and celebrate the success of others,” she said.

This also applies in the face of hardship, Sam added: to make the NHS truly the best place to work, support must be available when there are challenges in the workplace.

At the same time, patients, carers and families must always be kept in mind, and should be treated as equals, according to Sam.

“The NHS belongs to the public. We need them in the room and part of decision making. They are our greatest asset,” Sam said.

For those starting their journeys now, Sam would advise worrying less, and seeking help when it's needed.

“Above all else, ‘be you’,” she said.

## Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer, NHS England/Improvement

Prerana Issar is the newly appointed chief people officer at NHS England/Improvement, having joined from the United Nations, where she was the chief human resources officer for the World Food Programme.

She also believes in the value of confidence: the advice she would have given her younger self is to dream big.

“The grown-ups don’t know everything. Your ideas are needed. Don’t let anyone stop you,” she said.

By accelerating the move towards gender equality, the door will be open to equality of opportunities, support and access to health, she added.

“I hope we can create more urgency, impatience and real impactful, bold action towards gender equity in the NHS, and in society,” Prerana said.

“The NHS is the beating heart of the UK, a really big, bold idea – whether in 1948 or 2020. There are more than a million inspiring people all working towards the same outcome.”



True equality brings with it important repercussions for health outcomes, too.

“We are all human, nobody more valuable than another. We are creating poorer health outcomes with less diverse teams, and less engaged teams as a result of low inclusion,” Prerana said.

***“I want to increase the representation of women, BME, LGBT and people with disabilities at all levels of the NHS. I would like to see everyone have a space, a voice, be included, and be valued for who they are.”***

## Marie Gabriel CBE, Chair, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

Marie Gabriel CBE cited the support of the women she has worked with as the reason she has been able to achieve so much.

***“I would not be where I am if it weren’t for the wonderful women [I’ve worked with]. They have encouraged, inspired, helped find solutions, and opened doors.*”**

We have been there and know the challenges from a woman’s perspective,” she said.

For those navigating their way through the system now, she advised curiosity, bravery, openness, and kindness.



“[I am hoping] women everywhere will commit to uplifting and enabling at least one other woman – indeed, it could be co-support – and through this, women will succeed in improving their satisfaction at work, succeed in their careers, and together we will eradicate gender inequality,” Marie said.

This will help to make the NHS more effective, efficient and responsive to patient need, she added.

“We have the privilege of working alongside people when they are at their most vulnerable and assisting them to recover or discover a new way of being if they are living with a long-term condition,” Marie said.

She also highlighted how important it is to tackle inequality, not only in the way staff are treated, but in access to services and outcomes for patients. “It’s not right, but more than that, it means we are failing if we don’t,” she said.



## Dame Marianne Griffiths, Chief Executive, Western Sussex Hospitals



There is a difference between diversity and inclusion: this is what we must remember as we strive for equality within the health service, according to Dame Marianne Griffiths.

“I want to make the NHS a more inclusive and collaborative place, for individuals and organisations alike,” she said.

“A diverse organisation employs people from all backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities; an inclusive organisation explicitly seeks to draw on the full range of skills, talents and experiences that diversity presents, and use it to drive up standards of patient care.”

To meet the challenges that lie ahead, trusts must work more closely together so that the standards needed for patients are sustainable long-term, she added.

In her own career, the support of one woman in particular stands out.

***“I had the honour of working for a woman for eight years at a strategic health authority who was a true role model for me,”*** Dame Marianne said.

***“She built me up when I doubted myself, picked me up when I stumbled, and she celebrated with me when I succeeded. She was consistent and supportive, but firm.”***

I would love to be able to replicate that experience for others and make the difference for them that she made for me.”

This kind of support is needed across the entire health service: women must feel there is nothing to stop them achieving their ambitions.

“Not everyone has leadership ambitions... But what we do need is to help women at every level of our organisations define what success looks like to them,” Dame Marianne said.

“Then we need to make sure they have the development plans and opportunities in place so they can achieve that success. We do that by creating an inclusive culture that values and celebrates diversity, empowering each other to be bold in our ambitions.”

**Yvonne Coghill CBE OBE JP, Director, Workforce Race Equality Standard, NHS England/Improvement**

There are women from all walks of life working in the NHS, and they do an outstanding job in both clinical and non-clinical roles, Yvonne Coghill CBE JP said.

“My wish is to see each and every one of them valued for who they are and what they bring to the table in terms of their skills, expertise and commitment to the service,” she said.

“For that to happen, we all have to recognise and value each other’s unique gifts and talents and support each other to be the best that we can be.” She cited the fact that a supported and appreciated workforce is happier, and therefore more productive and “more willing to go the extra mile”.

By promoting a supportive culture, the NHS may become more appealing to those already working in it and to women who might be considering a career in the service, Yvonne added.

“If I had a magic wand, I would wave it across the NHS and immediately make it a more inclusive, compassionate, kind and thoughtful one. The evidence is that inclusivity and civility promote joy at work, which in turn increases productivity,” she said.



***“A caring, compassionate and supportive culture that values everyone, regardless of background, would make the NHS an even better place to work than it already is.”***

This is not to downplay how much good it does, or how satisfying it is to work within it: saving lives, bringing new life into the world, and caring for people at the end of their lives.

“It is the backbone of our country and I am proud to be part of that,” Yvonne said.

“I would tell my younger self to work hard, be kind and supportive of others, and remember what a privilege it is to serve in the world’s biggest and best health service.”



**Yvonne Ormston MBE, Chief Executive, Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust**

Women have a “uniquely special offering to the NHS and patients”, Yvonne Ormston said, and it is vital to address their underrepresentation in the NHS in senior management.

“As senior leaders it is important to role model our values and ensure that all voices are heard, but particularly those who are underrepresented at senior levels,” she said.

***“Diversity enriches our thinking and innovation and therefore improves patient outcomes and staff morale.”***

***To perpetuate this, we must inspire younger women to develop their careers and fulfil their maximum potential,*** Yvonne added.

To them, she would advise having the confidence to make contributions and make sure their voices are heard.

“There were many times I would say something that wasn’t heard until it was repeated by a male colleague. Senior women at that time were not always very helpful to aspiring women like myself who were trying to juggle family and career,” she said.

There is much to be proud of in the NHS now – the compassion, enthusiasm and commitment of staff are humbling, Yvonne said – but staff survey results also show there is more to be done to improve.

“Our staff survey results still tell us we are not looking after staff as well as we could; in particular, LGBT staff, BME staff and staff with disabilities have a poorer working experience,” Yvonne said.

“We provide compassionate care to our patients but seem to struggle with the concept of providing compassionate care to our staff.”





## Dr Henrietta Hughes, National Guardian for the NHS

For Dr Henrietta Hughes, it was her mother and both of her grandmothers who first gave her the encouragement she needed.

“There was never a moment that they didn’t think everything was possible. Now, I also get the same encouragement from my husband,” she said.

By promoting a supportive culture, the NHS may become more appealing to those already working in it and to women who might be considering a career in the service, Yvonne added.

***“I want everyone to feel that same encouragement, which makes you feel daring and courageous, nervous and excited. But also, that there’s no failure, only feedback.”***

The aim must be to lift as we climb, Henrietta said, and to make sure everyone is alive to the amazing possibilities on the horizon.

“A kind word, a phone conversation or a coffee can make a massive difference. I want everyone to thrive, to feel that they deserve a mentor and to get help in identifying how to achieve this,” she said.

For the NHS itself, Henrietta agreed with other respondents that it is the people that make it what it is.

“I would like to say thank you to patients, public and service users. Where would we be without you?” she said.

“I would also like to say thank you to everyone who works in the NHS. You have been there for me and my family and loved ones when we needed you most.”

However, too many staff still experience discrimination, bullying and harassment, which all have a negative effect on their wellbeing and in turn, on patient care, Henrietta said.

“I would like everyone to be able to speak up about patient safety and the wellbeing of colleagues,” she added.

“You do not need to put up with bullying or harassment – if anything, taking action enhances your reputation.”

**Andrea Sutcliffe CBE, Chief Executive and Registrar, Nursing and Midwifery Council**



There are three things Andrea Sutcliffe CBE would change about the NHS if she could: increasing understanding of the critical role of social care; consistent action in delivering person-centred, co-ordinated care; and for the voices of nurses and midwives to have a greater influence on the development of policy and practice.

These are long-term, wide-reaching goals, and before they can be achieved, one of the key steps will be to foment true equality for all staff, whatever their gender or background.

“[I want] to demonstrate that women are achieving amazing things and can make a huge difference for people using health and care services and the colleagues we work with,” Andrea said.

***“[We also need] a positive way of talking about the contribution women make, to inspire and support others who may be feeling challenged, undermined and unappreciated, which impacts their confidence.”***

With that in mind, the advice she would have offered her younger self would be to be herself and to be confident.

“Understand you will make mistakes; learn from them and don’t let them stop you,” she said. “Take the opportunities to make a difference that come along and enjoy the friendships you will make.”



## Dr Layla McCay, Director of International Relations, NHS Confederation

Dr Layla McCay cited two mentors in her career who have helped to reach her current position – one female, and one male.

“My first mentor, a male pathologist called George Lindop, helped me look beyond the day-to-day role and consider the bigger picture, and more diverse and personally rewarding ways I could contribute,” she said.

“My next, Claire Gerada, gave me the confidence to get involved in health policy and set me on a path to the really interesting career I am now lucky to have.” Around the time she graduated from medical school, in 2004, senior female role models were still few and far between, she added – and there is still work to be done here.

“Today, I am seeing so many more women in senior positions, and that’s fantastic. But I’m still struck by the disproportionate representation of men in senior positions,” Layla said.

“I feel that visibility and representation are really important in changing expectations, and inspiring people to make decisions that they might not otherwise have made.”

She is hoping the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will help to inspire people of all genders to do great things in health and care.

***“In particular, I hope the visibility of this campaign helps to remind and inspire people that they can do great things in so many ways, no matter what role they have or where they work,”*** Layla said.

“I also hope it will help address the subconscious biases that some people still have about gender within the NHS.”

“I would like to see barriers broken down so that talented people can more easily progress and achieve on the basis of that talent, rather than having to battle through assumptions based on gender, race, sexual orientation, and other types of diversity,” she said.



## Dr Nikita Kanani, National Guardian for the NHS

To explain her perspective, Dr Nikita Kanani paraphrased the words of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, who passed away this year: “If you want to fly, you have to give up the things that weigh you down.”

***“#WonderfulWomenDo is a campaign to support, lift and inspire other women to be whoever they want to be, to live their best lives and embrace their #worklifechaos,”*** Nikita said

“I want to help women to find each other, support each other, and have great joy doing so.”

She also highlighted the immense capacity to care, demonstrated by those working in the NHS, for each other and for the whole population. To help support them, she would wish for the simple gift of time, she said.

“If I had some Harry Potter magic, I would give us all some time. Whether just a moment to connect with colleagues, or reflect on the day,” she said.

“[We need time and] space – for each other.”

It’s also vital to remember to be kind and to remember to be human, Nikita added.

“Absolutely live your values and speak your own truth, because no one else will. And we need more of it. Never, ever pull up a ladder behind you, but create steps and spaces so that you move forward as a tribe, as a family,” she said.

## Saffron Cordery, Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Providers



The NHS is “the embodiment of social solidarity”, Saffron Cordery said, but there is also room for greater equity.

“I want to see more equity across gender, race, sexuality, gender identity, religion, disability, health status – both interpersonally and structurally,” she said.

“I hope [the campaign] creates a more open and supportive culture, with a tangible sense of solidarity.”

Saffron is hoping the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will inspire women to speak up about the challenges they face and ask for help when they need it. She also hopes they will continue to share their knowledge and wisdom.

***“I believe that the wonderful women [in health and care] can do wonderful things to support, inspire, protect and promote one another at work, at home, socially and in the spaces in between,”*** she said.

She also echoed the words of many of the women featured in this report, advising confidence and being true to oneself.

“Take advantage of the huge and diverse opportunities the NHS offers, but don’t be afraid to speak your mind and be authentic,” she said.





## Dr Navina Evans, Chief Executive, East London Foundation Trust

Like all the women who have contributed to this report, Dr Navina Evans has many strings to her bow. She has more than 20 years of clinical experience in psychiatry, medicine and paediatrics, has completed the aspiring chief executive programme at the NHS Leadership Academy, and in 2018, she was named the second most influential NHS chief executive in the country by the Health Service Journal.

Her hope is that the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will open the door to more women with the skills and talents to make change.

***“I believe that there is an untapped wealth of resource, skill, experience and fantastic qualities among many women in the NHS. I want to do what I can to enable the NHS to benefit,”***

Navina said

“I am hoping that there will be an impact on recruitment, retention, improving resources, quality and safety of service delivery.”

Once that door is open, those coming through it should enjoy every moment of contact with others, Navina said.

“You will be a better person for it,” she added.

It is the people – both staff and those they care for – that make the NHS what it is, according to Evans, but there is room to change how we think about good health.

“We can do this through greater inclusion and diversity,” she said.

## Cara Charles-Barks MBE, Chief Executive, Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust



The importance of receiving support from other women working within health and care is of personal significance to Cara Charles-Barks.

“Early in my career I had, on a number of occasions, the opposite experience from senior women I worked for and it shaped me and my values,” she said.

“Being a positive role model and doing everything you can to support, develop and mentor those around you to be their very best and supporting them to become our leaders of the future should be embedded in everything we do.”

It is this that forms the foundation for everything the health service hopes to achieve regarding the wider ambition for inclusion, she added.

***“I want all of our staff – especially women – to be able to access the opportunities and support that they need to be the best version of themselves and to achieve their fullest potential,”*** Cara said.

“I love the art of the possible through working in the NHS, I love the diversity, the ambition, the passion and compassion and, at the end of the day, the ability to make a difference for our people – those that use our services and those that work within them.”

The ambitions outlined in the interim NHS People Plan set out much-needed change and represent the biggest opportunity to create an NHS that reflects everyone that works within it, according to Cara. It is also an opportunity to support staff to give their best at work, which ultimately means those using services will always receive the best care possible, she added.

“Know your values and stay true to them. Kindness and compassion are crucial, and most importantly, love what you do. Don’t forget, passion and energy are infectious,” she said.

## Tracie Joliff, National Director of Inclusion, NHS Leadership Academy



The people in the NHS are “simply the best”, Tracie Joliff said, and she hopes work on improving inclusion can be spread across the whole system.

“We know this matters for staff, patients and the diverse communities that we serve. We cannot exercise compassion in the absence of inclusion, and nor can we improve population health without addressing exclusion,” she said.

“Inclusion is [everyone’s responsibility], not just for those who are most affected by exclusion, yet we have had years of ambition for inclusion that have not been realised.”

Part of this is addressing the obstacles and challenges faced by women and girls the world over, many of which are evident in the workplace, and can have a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing, Tracie added. It therefore a duty for all of us to work towards gender equality.

***“Achieving equity for women and girls is an ambition that everyone should own, irrespective of their own identity,”*** Tracie said.

“Women make up... 77 per cent of the NHS workforce, a diverse group whose needs should not be ignored. All women deserve to be supported to achieve their potential, giving of their best and making the NHS the best place to work, while improving population health.”

Women must be empowered to support other women in the workplace in order to create the conditions for sustaining this, according to Tracie.

***Her hope is that the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will raise awareness of the reasons why women need the support of other women in the workplace, and how staff can work together to create an environment that supports everyone.***

“I hope it shines a light on the benefits women can bring at all levels of the system, showcasing how they can play a positive role in transforming workplace cultures,” she said.

## Suzanne Tracey, Chief Executive, Chief Executive, Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust



Suzanne Tracey emphasised the importance of paying forward the support and encouragement leaders have provided over the course of her career.

“I have been lucky enough to have fantastic support throughout my career that has stretched, encouraged and pushed me in equal measure,” she said.

“Having this has helped me achieve things I had never thought of and, in some cases, didn’t think I was capable of. I would like to offer the same support and encouragement to others.”

***Her aim is to help others, and particularly women, to be “excited and inspired” to make the most of the opportunities available to them, and to be emboldened to take the next steps in what can be “a rewarding and immensely satisfying career”.***

Like the other respondents in this report, Suzanne also stressed how important the people working within and using the NHS are.

“The people I work with in my own organisation and right across the NHS and wider system are the best in the whole world,” Suzanne said.

“There is such kindness and compassion – it makes me very proud of being a part of something very special. The work is hard and pressurised at times, but the sense of being part of a team that is achieving amazing things each and every day is a real privilege.”

It’s also worth remembering that even those who appear to be calm and in control may be struggling as much as anyone, according to Suzanne.

“Don’t be intimidated by all the amazing people you encounter. Be braver and have more faith in yourself – you can achieve more than you can imagine,” she said.



## Dr Sara Munro, Chief Executive, Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

It is important to celebrate the support of colleagues and leaders, but it is also worth taking into account and learning from situations that have been less positive in order to become a better role model, suggested Dr Sara Munro.

“As a female leader, I have experienced fantastic support over the years, but I have also had some pretty poor advice and had people try to hold me back,” she said.

“Therefore, I feel I have a responsibility to support and enable others to progress in their careers in the way I have been able to – that gives me hope for the future leadership of the NHS.”

Staff in the NHS are under enormous pressure, and this can take its toll. This means it is the responsibility of leaders to support colleagues, Sara said.

“The nature of the job itself can at times be very distressing and traumatic, which is unavoidable, so the more we can do to support and equip staff, the better,” she added.

***Sara is hoping the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will be able to shine a light on how senior leaders can inspire others and create opportunities for people to develop.***

“That in turn creates future generations of leaders who will do likewise,” Sara said.

“[The NHS] is full of people who are united by their values and want to do their best for others, who are passionate about making a difference, and who are always trying to improve what we do.”

The experience and opportunities a career in the health service can provide can be invaluable, but there will be ups and downs, Sara added.

“Some days will be very tough, but you learn equally from both [good and bad], so don’t ever forget that,” she said. “Always be open and share your experiences and learning with others.”

## Siobhan Harrington, Chief Executive, Whittington Health NHS Trust



The dedication of those working in health and care is admirable, but we must also acknowledge the times when things do not go as well as they should, Siobhan Harrington's comments show.

"I love the commitment and passion of staff for caring for people. I appreciate how we can all access healthcare freely, whoever we are. I love how proud you feel when things go right. I appreciate having an opportunity to do one of the best jobs in the NHS," she said.

"[But] there are times where people do not treat each other well as staff working in the NHS. This impacts on the care that people receive. I want to create the change that means that we all treat each other the way we would expect to be treated."

Examples of this can already be found among the women she has worked with.

***"As a woman working as a senior leader in the NHS, I have seen and experienced the power of support and friendship from other women. I have seen how this has helped people's confidence and raised the level of their aspirations,"*** Siobhan said.

"I have also found that being part of this [network] has helped build my resilience and appreciate the value of humour and the value of sharing the experience and humanity of all of us."

She is hoping the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign will have a wider impact across the sector, not just on leaders but on women at all levels, and even on the entirety of the workforce.

"It is all about people and the relationships between people," she said. "You can achieve whatever you aspire to; find a mentor and do the best you can in every role that you have, and it will lead to something special."

## Dame Jackie Daniel, Chief Executive, the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Dame Jackie described how, when she joined the NHS almost 40 years ago, she knew she had “found her place”.

“I came to the NHS wanting to make a difference – providing care and treatment to people when they most needed it. That feels as true today [as it did then],” she said.

“I have a less direct impact as a CEO, but with more than 15,000 Newcastle staff with me, we can do more to make a significant difference, aiming to provide excellent care and treatment. The NHS as an employer has so much to offer and is in many places a truly great place to work.”

Importantly, the health service is now at a juncture where launching a campaign such as this is more important than it has ever been, according to Dame Jackie.

***“My hope is that we unlock a movement positivity across [health and care], encouraging and supporting women to support one another. I hope we can unleash a... forceful movement for change, providing inspiration, motivation: a recognition of what #WonderfulWomenDo,”*** she said.

There is also scope to raise awareness of continuing inequality throughout society, and to make a visible difference to the lives of women, and indeed, everyone working in the NHS, Dame Jackie added.

“I want to make the NHS the most accessible and diverse organisation and place to work. Inequalities continue – we don’t have a level playing field for women, LGBT people, people from BME backgrounds, and people with disabilities,” she said.

“If we want to truly [unlock] all our potential, we must continue to strive for greater equality. Difference is positive, and diversity leads to a better offer for our patients.”

She also stressed the importance of “enjoying the journey” and appreciating how “hugely gratifying” working in health and care can be.

“[It’s also important] perhaps to maintain a balance of high courage and consideration – trusting your instincts and doing the right thing even when it’s difficult,” she said.

## Angela Hillery, Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust



Angela Hillery stressed the importance of seeking guidance and support from leaders in order to move forward professionally.

“Seek to connect with others via networks; gain help and assistance and the mentorship you need,” she said.

Examples of this can already be found among the women she has worked with.

***Angela is hoping the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign can bring to the fore the important role women leaders play in health and care, and the difference they can make, individually and collectively.***

“[I would like to see] others feel empowered not to accept what isn’t right, and gain confidence to challenge and believe in themselves,” she said

Angela echoed the sentiments of other respondents, emphasising that the NHS needs to make strides towards real inclusion, and cultures within organisations that value people and celebrate their differences.

She also agreed that it is the people in health and care that make the sector what it is.

“[They] go over and above every day with the work they do, despite the challenging context, environment and uncertainty. People within the NHS never fail to amaze me, and I feel privileged to be a leader in [the health service],” Angela said.



## Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE, Chief Midwifery Officer, NHS England/Improvement



Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE has high hopes for the #WonderfulWomenDo campaign: she is hoping it can support the NHS to maintain a “diverse talent pipeline of women who are educationally prepared, with equal opportunities to lead the NHS beyond the 21st century”.

***“I am supporting this campaign because I believe that if the skill, competence and esteemed knowledge of women were recognised, valued and utilised in the NHS, then our services would be even greater than they are already,”***

she said.

The campaign has the potential to help sustain “excellent world-class services that are the envy of the world”, according to Jacqueline.

There is already much to envy: the health service is free at the point of entry, and it is inclusive, too, Jacqueline said.

“Healthcare doesn’t discriminate – diverse people use it and diverse people provide it,” she said.

Of course, there is still room for change, according to Jacqueline, including improving proportionate universalism – i.e. the resourcing and delivery of universal services according to the level of need.

Finally, her advice to her younger self echoes that of the other women who contributed to this report.

“Be bolder; stand by your convictions; respect but do not be controlled by the hierarchy that has the potential to limit creativity,” she said.

**Dr Liz Mear, Chief Executive, The Innovation Agency – the Academic Health Science Network for the North West Coast**



Liz Mear cited Bev Humphrey, the former chief executive of Greater Manchester NHS Foundation Trust, as someone who has been an influence.

“[She] was a real inspiration for me, as she brought her whole self to the role and helped us all to have a work-life blend that met our needs,” Liz said. She agreed with the other respondents that a lack of self-belief is often what holds women back in their careers.

***“Sometimes, women have a lack of confidence in what they can achieve even though they are fantastically talented. I hope the [#WonderfulWomenDo] campaign helps women to see people like themselves succeeding in careers that make a real difference to people’s lives,”*** she said.

She is also hoping that the campaign will help women to feel empowered to take the next step in their careers and to make their views heard in their current roles. Liz stressed how important the health service is for the difference it makes to people’s lives, and how vital the commitment of the staff who work within it is.

“I’d like the service to think about how it can be flexible with its staff. As a busy mum, step-nan and carer I’ve been supported by bosses both male and female to work around these real-life issues,” she said.

She also echoed the view that strong professional relationships are key.

“Working at a system level is very important for us all and it takes time to build meaningful relationships,” she said.

“I would like us to work more as a system with our social care, charity, voluntary sector partners and academic partners so we can serve our citizens in the way that suits them,” she added.

## What's next

The next step is to help the movement to grow. To do this, we are inviting you to join the conversation. Use the hashtag **#WonderfulWomenDo** to share stories of how the women you have worked with in health and care have supported you, thank them for their help, and share tips and best practice for supporting women going forward.

You are also invited to tag the person who has helped you and ask them to share their own stories of those who have supported them, and to encourage all colleagues to add their voices.

You can follow the hashtag to see more of these stories and gain inspiration for yourself and your organisation.

The campaign will highlight and celebrate instances where support exists for women, and encourage future action in this area. It is about celebrating women, but it is not limited to women: people of any gender and at any stage of their careers are encouraged to get involved and can acknowledge either women or others as having supported them.

The aim is to help spread hope and positivity across the health and care sector, as well as bolstering improvements to the way staff are supported to progress in their careers, through sharing examples of best practice. The campaign is being formally launched on 13 November at the Health & Care Women Leaders Network annual conference.

## Other activities

The NHS Confederation and NHS Employers are also involved in various activities to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

This encompasses the Health & Care Women Leaders Network, and also the BME Leadership Network, which aims to improve understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion and publish the benefits to help deliver better care for all; to improve and sustain the number of BME leaders working in the NHS; and to profile the diverse range of BME leaders delivering solutions across the health and care system.

The diversity and inclusion team at NHS Employers supports and showcases the latest developments in this area, both within and outside of the NHS. It uses the latest evidence to stimulate action on the ground and aims to change the focus of the debate from equality inputs, to proven business outcomes. In doing so, it supports NHS trusts to co-design services with diverse patients, people and communities.

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### NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership body that brings together and speaks on behalf of all organisations that plan, commission and provide NHS services.

#### We support our members by:

- being an influential system leader
- representing them with politicians, national bodies, the unions and in Europe
- providing a strong national voice on their behalf
- supporting them to continually improve care for patients and the public.

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### NHS Employers

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We help employers to develop a sustainable workforce, improve staff experience and be the best employers they can be.

Our practical resources and expert insights help make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues, to keep employers up to date with the latest thinking and ensure they are informed and equipped to support the NHS workforce.

We generate opportunities to network and share knowledge and we actively seek the views of workforce leaders to make sure their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice.

We also lead the national collective relationships with trade unions on behalf of the NHS and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.



**My commitment to make sure women's voices are heard, valued and responded to in the workplace is:**

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**The people who have inspired and supported me during my career are:**  
**(Don't forget to connect, thank and share *#WonderfulWomenDo*)**

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## Tweets

Many inspirational women have influenced my journey towards becoming an NHS CEO. In 1999 a female leader encouraged me to take on my first leadership role. Thanks **@CNOEngland** **@yvonnecoghill** **#WonderfulWomenDo**

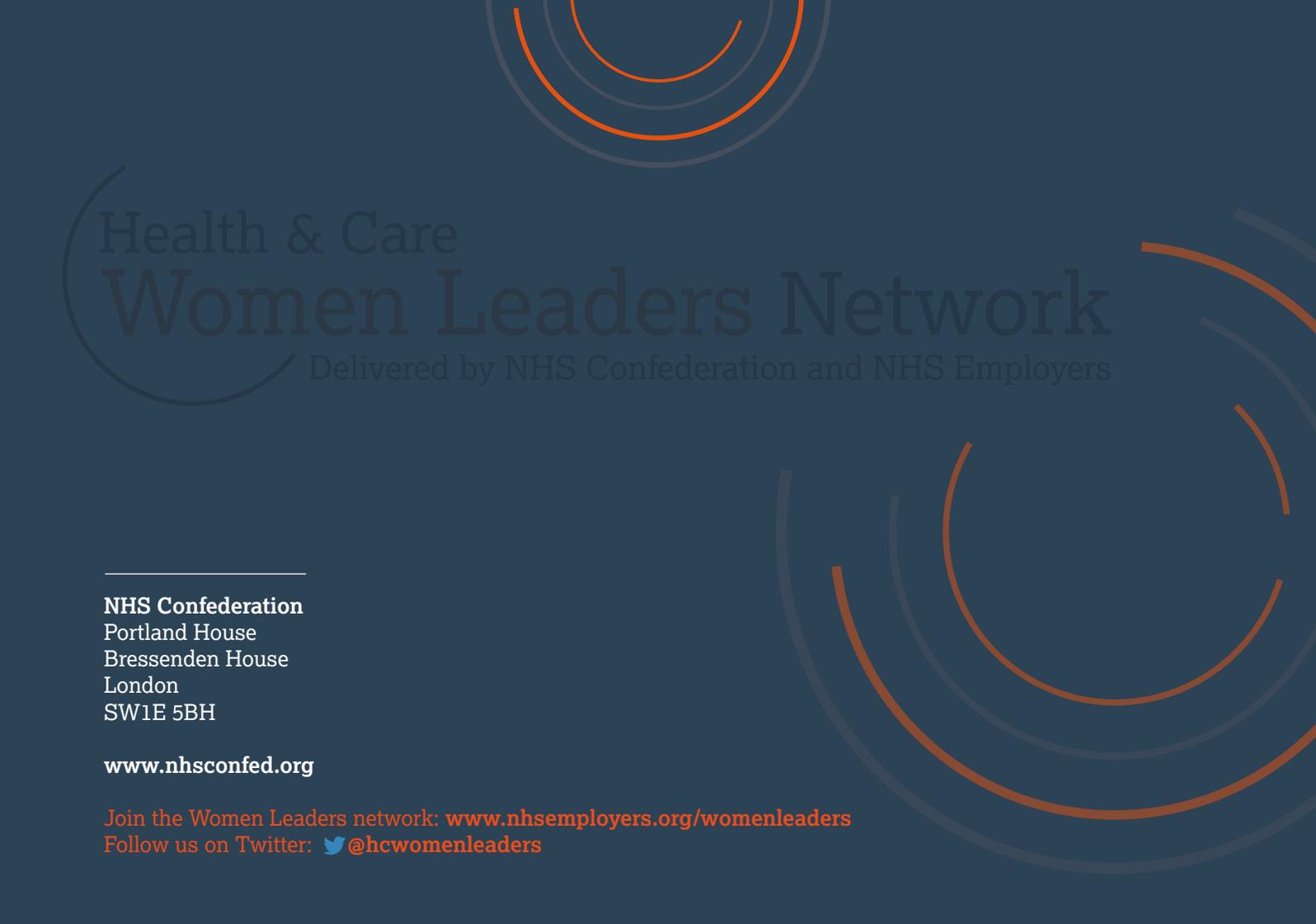


Thanks for the courage and leadership of **@tara\_hewitt** a true champion of human rights and equality. I work with many inspiring women across the NHS. Who inspired you? **#WonderfulWomenDo**



So many fabulous women are making a positive difference to people's lives. Who supported and encouraged you? **#WonderfulWomenDo**





Health & Care

# Women Leaders Network

Delivered by NHS Confederation and NHS Employers

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**[www.nhsconfed.org](http://www.nhsconfed.org)**

Join the Women Leaders network: [www.nhsemployers.org/womenleaders](http://www.nhsemployers.org/womenleaders)

Follow us on Twitter: [@hcwomenleaders](https://twitter.com/hcwomenleaders)