**The SAS Advocate in Wales**

# **Introduction**

Health and wellbeing is at the centre of *A Healthier Wales* and is reflected in other agreements between employers and the BMA, including the *NHS Wales Fatigue and Facilities Charter* and NHS Wales approach to healthy working relationships as set out in the Respect and Resolution policy.

Through contract negotiations, Welsh Government, NHS Wales Employers and BMA Cymru Wales had many conversations about the health and wellbeing of SAS doctors and in particular the experience of SAS doctors with bullying and harassment in the workplace. Whilst processes are in place to support SAS doctors, there are all too often reports of a poor experience of the working environment with instances of bullying and harassment and difficulties with receiving adequate support for their health and wellbeing. This has also been evident in numerous surveys by the BMA, the GMC and employers.

It was agreed that further action was required improve the experience of SAS doctors. The introduction of new SAS contracts is an opportunity to address longstanding workplace culture factors, to further empower SAS doctors and to highlight their value within NHS Wales.

It was agreed that SAS doctors needed a named individual in their Health Board/Trust who would act as a nexus point for SAS issues. The SAS advocate is intended to fulfil this function. The advocate will act as an important additional interface between SAS doctors and management, complementing existing structures and processes as well as taking forward their own programme of work. They will act as a point of contact for SAS doctors, as well as advocating on their behalf, and improving the visibility of SAS doctors within the organisation. Advocates will also work with each other to share best practice and ensure a joined-up approach across organisations in Wales.

# **The SAS advocate will be introduced by each employing organisation in Wales.**

The role will be a dedicated appointment within the 6 large Health Boards.[[1]](#footnote-1) Within Powys UHB, Velindre NHS Trust and Public Health Wales, the role and functions will be aligned to an existing role with the individual undertaking the functions as set out below, the only difference being in respect of the numbers of SAS doctors within the organisation concerned. The SAS advocate is a strategic role to promote and improve support for SAS doctor’s health and wellbeing. It will be an additional role for an existing employee and it is not intended to replace existing support for SAS doctors. Organisations must ensure the holder has adequate time and resources allocated to devote to the role – it has both proactive as well as reactive functions.

# **Key results areas**

The advocate will:

* Provide help and support and be a visible point of contact for SAS doctors in the organisation.
* Signpost SAS doctors to the relevant departments, colleagues, or information within the employing organisation as well as, where relevant, trade union representatives to provide support on their health and wellbeing including actions to address concerns raised regarding working relationships.
* Work with the trust board and LNC to ensure a consistent approach to SAS doctors health and wellbeing is adopted across the Health Board/Trust.

# **Actions and activities**

The most effective interventions to advocate for SAS doctors locally will depend upon the structure and context of each organisation. However, the range of actions that the role holder could undertake include, but are not limited to:

* Identifying all SAS doctors in the organisation – how and where they are working.
* Contributing to a proactive, informed and empowered SAS workforce through positive examples, encouraging doctors to share best practice, support innovation and raise issues and concerns as appropriate.
* Researching and collating information on their own organisation’s performance in facilitating and supporting the health and wellbeing of SAS doctors e.g. doctors approaching the latter part of their career, occupational health and bullying and harassment.
* Creating a forum for SAS doctors – this could be a virtual forum to enable SAS doctors to exchange suggestions, seek and offer advice and discuss relevant topics.
* Including a regular item on agendas for reporting to relevant senior management meetings.
* Monitoring the implementation of guidance relating to SAS doctors, including the SAS charter and Wales Good Practice Guide, within the Health Board/Trust.
* Engaging with local negotiating committee as appropriate.
* Engaging and sharing best practice with fellow advocates through a facilitated network and annual conferences/events.
* Acting as an early point of contact to help and advise individual SAS doctors where required, complementary to existing structures, including signposting internally and to external organisations.
* Monitoring and inputting into SAS induction processes to ensure these are timely and effective.
* Collating information from sources e.g. staff surveys, informal and formal complaints, and reviews to identify patterns and enable action to address factors impacting on the experience of SAS doctors in the workplace, for example poor management practices or excessive workloads.

To support SAS doctors, it is recommended and is good practice to ensure:

* That the advocate has a page and their contact details readily available on the organisation’s intranet.
* The advocate is introduced to new SAS doctors as part of their induction, explaining their role and suggesting areas which they can help with.

The post holder will be expected to act with full regard to the requirements of the organisation's policies and procedures, including those relating to health and safety.

# **Assignment and review of work**

* The advocate will be interviewed and appointed by a panel that must include an SAS doctor.
* It is important that the role holder has the confidence of SAS doctors employed in their Health Board.
* Where possible, the role holder should be a SAS doctor or have experience in a SAS grade.
* Where possible, the role holder should not be the current SAS tutor to ensure the distinct remits of the two roles remain separate.
* The advocate will report directly to the Medical Director.
* The post holder is expected to generate work in response to areas of concern from SAS doctors.
* The post holder will agree objectives with the Medical Director, who will appraise the post holder. The system of performance management will include the opportunity for SAS doctors to contribute to the assessment, for example, through a system of 360‐degree appraisal.
* At the advocate’s appraisal, it must be discussed whether the number of SAS doctors covered by the advocate is impacting the advocate’s ability to provide support to them. If they feel their ability to support SAS doctors is being impacted by this, solutions should be mutually agreed.
* It is expected that an advocate will require at least one session per week to fulfil the role effectively, but this will depend on the numbers of SAS doctors represented and the geography of the Health Board. Where possible, employers should respond positively to requests from advocates for more resource/time where it is required.
* Advocates must be offered sufficient resource and time to undertake the role. This should include appropriate administrative support, IT systems, office space and access to information and data to undertake the role.
* In general, the advocate role should be held by one individual for no longer than three continuous years.

# **Competences**

To be effective in their role, the advocate should have, or be provided adequate training and support to develop:

* A thorough understanding of the needs of SAS doctors in their organisation.
* Where applicable to the organisation that they cover, a broad understanding of issues affecting SAS doctors in a range of settings including hospital, primary care, public health, and other non‐hospital settings and where necessary are able to signpost the SAS doctor to the relevant departments.
* Ability to advocate effectively, capable of challenging and effecting change with senior management.
* Strong interpersonal skills, with the ability to build and hold professional relationships and develop trust with individual SAS doctors and the wider SAS workforce, management and other stakeholders.
* Ability to liaise with key stakeholders on health and wellbeing issues, including the Medical Director, educational/clinical supervisors, medical staffing/HR colleagues, Occupational Health, bullying and harassment officers and health and wellbeing leads. This may include involvement in local mediation processes, to input and advise where specific issues arise between SAS doctors and key stakeholders.
* Knowledge and understanding of the health and wellbeing challenges facing SAS doctors.
* Understanding of the broader workplace equalities agenda.

1. Aneurin Bevan UHB, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB, Cardiff & Vale UHB, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB, Hywel Dda UHB and Swansea Bay UHB. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)