Nick Lipley reports on the 2007 NHS Confederation annual conference, held in London last month

NHS culture ‘encourages bullying’

The culture of the NHS encourages bullying and stifles leadership potential, according to an NHS Confederation report published at the conference.

The report was compiled from a series of interviews with a cross section of senior managers who offered their thoughts on NHS leadership and management.

It spells out 15 ‘challenges’ for the NHS including:

- Decisions can take a long time to implement in the NHS because they require consensus
- Middle managers, who are sandwiched between clinicians and senior managers, are often disempowered and need more support
- There is a culture within the NHS that encourages bullying and this stifles leadership potential.

The report, entitled The Challenges of Leadership in the NHS, concludes: ‘Boards must create time to develop longer term strategy while also paying close attention to the detail of their patients’ and employees’ everyday experience.

‘Trusts and government must focus on clinical engagement, supporting and developing managers, creating stability in managerial roles and dealing with the culture of bullying.’

Management ‘guru’ Gerry Robinson, who starred in BBC Two’s Can Gerry Robinson Fix the NHS?, states in his foreword to the document: ‘Management is not an exercise in bludgeoning people. It is about getting people on side and making them feel important.’

‘The secret is to make them feel special, part of an organisation that works.’

See also pages 16-18

News in brief

Seven out of ten people believe that politicians should not be involved in the day-to-day running of the NHS, according to a survey more than 2,000 members of the public. The results were announced as the NHS Confederation published its report, From the Ground Up: How autonomy could deliver a better NHS, which argues that autonomy should be devolved and accountability increased in the health service. The report suggests that behavioural change, not further restructuring, will solve many of the current problems in the NHS.

The NHS Partners Network, which represents the private sector, is joining the NHS Confederation as one of its member networks in a move to promote better engagement between all providers of NHS services. The NHS Partners Network, which has been in existence for just over a year, represents ten independent organisations commissioned by the NHS to provide elective and diagnostic care to NHS patients free at the point of delivery.

The Scottish government is opposed to the use of public money to help the private sector compete with the NHS, delegates were told. Health and Well-being secretary Nicola Sturgeon said: ‘We believe it is sensible to deliver health care on the basis of collaboration and cooperation, rather than division and competition. We oppose the use of public money to help the private sector compete with the NHS.

The Scottish public expects public money to support public services rather than the private sector.’