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UK Healthcare Workforce Recovery After the COVID-19 Pandemic

The BMJ and the Nuffield Trust recently hosted a roundtable discussion concerning the issue of workforce retention in the UK's NHS – why workers leave the NHS and how staff wellbeing and retention can be improved. Also under discussion was the Nuffield Trust report, 'The Long Goodbye' which provided statistics on the alarming high portion of healthcare staff leaving the NHS.

The roundtable panel consisted of:

- Kamran Abbasi, editor in chief, The BMJ
- Billy Palmer, senior fellow, Nuffield Trust
- Lucina Rolewicz, researcher, Nuffield Trust
- Mark Britnell, global healthcare expert and senior partner, KPMG International
- Neil Greenburg, consultant occupational and forensic psychiatrist, King's College London's centre for military health research
- Rose Penfold, National Institute for Clinical Research academic clinical fellow in geriatrics
- Rammya Mathew, GP and quality improvement lead for Islington GP Federation
- Partha Kar, diabetes consultant and NHS England's national advisor for diabetes
- Danny Mortimer, chief executive of NHS Employers

Reasons for leaving positions mainly centred on finding alternative positions, poor work/life balance, or personal health. Job satisfaction, pressure, job place culture, and burnout were also heavily cited reasons. However, some of the reasons for staff leaving is the result of reshuffling within the NHS.

During the conversation, it became evident that healthcare staff shortage is global but some countries can better recognise the relation between staff morale, wellbeing, better patient care, and economic growth. In simple term, the economy won't grow if the population is unhealthy; the population can't be healthy if the health professionals are demoralised and unwell.

Emphasis was placed on better staff management and attention to their personal needs and investment in technology to improve the working environment. The roundtable panel presented a range of tried and tested solutions, built on flexibility, staff morale and wellbeing, and long-term hope. A consistent theme was allowing staff better control over their work schedule, introducing better workplace equity, and paying attention to staff mental health.

Source: The BMJ, The Nuffield Trust

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