

## PUBLIC SECTOR

# NHS teamwork is called into question

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Much of the teamwork in the NHS is not as effective as it could be, HR practitioners have been warned.

Michael West, professor of organisational psychology at Aston Business School, Birmingham, told delegates at the HR and OD Adds Value conference in Stirling that this year's NHS staff survey revealed some worrying statistics for HR practitioners.

In the survey of more than 200,000 NHS employees, 89 per cent said they worked in a team, but further questioning revealed that only 41 per cent met the criteria for being in a well-structured and effective team.

A well-structured team was defined as one that had clear objectives, close working among team members and that met regularly to discuss effectiveness and how it could be improved.

West said the disparity was a worry, given that his previous research showed that death rates after emergency surgery fell by 275 per 100,000 patients for every extra 25 per cent of hospital staff who worked in teams (*PM*, 26 October 2001).

"When people think they're working in teams, but they're not really, there's less likely to be a fusion of responsibility – everybody assumes that someone else is responsible. That's more dangerous than someone who says they're not working in a team," West warned.

West has also conducted research, as yet unpublished, in 80 hospitals, which showed there was better patient care when the organisational culture encouraged teams to take time out to review their objectives, look at their effectiveness in achieving their aims and how they could make improvements. He said that the key to teamwork improving



SMOOTH OPERATORS? ONLY 41 PER CENT OF NHS STAFF MET THE CRITERIA FOR BEING IN A WELL-STRUCTURED AND EFFECTIVE TEAM

was a combination of staff working in teams and working effectively as individuals. They should also constantly be looking at their performance.

Other research by West showed that working in well-structured

teams also benefited the psychological well-being of staff.

While 35 per cent of staff who did not work in a team were so stressed they would benefit from professional intervention, the figure was only 21 per cent for those who

were working in teams. "The benefits for teams were social support, clarity of role and being buffered from the organisation," said West.

[www.abs.aston.ac.uk](http://www.abs.aston.ac.uk); [www.chi.nhs.uk](http://www.chi.nhs.uk)

## AGE DISCRIMINATION

## Jobs outlook improves for older workers

The tide is turning in favour of older people in the workplace, according to the agencies that help them to find jobs.

At a Downing Street reception held last week by Age Positive, the government body campaigning to tackle ageism in the workplace, there was agreement that many organisations had got the message not to discriminate against people aged over 50.

Pensions minister Malcolm Wicks, who attended the event (held during Age Positive Week), said that the tight labour market now favoured the over-50s, although only 70 per cent were in work. Both Patrick Gratton, who runs

the Third Age Employment Network, and Jill Barnes, head of the recruitment agency 40plus, said that in the past two years it had become a lot easier to place older people.

Gratton said this was particularly true in retail and banking, although swathes of the economy were still hostile to the over-50s. But he added: "Some people are their own worst enemies by being too rigid about the job they want." He called for more training opportunities for older people to help them find new careers.

The Downing Street reception celebrated the fact that Age Positive

has now secured its hundredth Age Positive employer champion. Employment services company Maritz now joins other employers such as HBOS, Thomas Cook and law firm Morgan Cole, all of which have taken steps to tackle age discrimination.

Earlier in the day, this year's Age Positive Employer Outstanding Achievement Award was presented to Bridgend County Borough Council. Other winning employers were Yorkshire Water, FirstGroup plc, Morgan Cole and Iceland Foods plc.

[www.agepositive.gov.uk](http://www.agepositive.gov.uk)