

New NHS Agency Spend Rules Clarified

News Article



The NHS Trust Development Authority (NHS TDA) and Monitor have told NHS Trusts how much they can spend on agency staff following Jeremy Hunt's call to tackle the issue earlier this year.

Earlier this year the health secretary said that staffing agencies are "ripping off the NHS". Hunt revealed that the NHS's annual bill for agency staff has risen from £1.8 billion to £3.3 billion over the past three years and called for the introduction of measures to combat this rise.

These measures included a cap on the amount agency staff can be paid, the amount Trusts can spend on temps and a ban on using staffing agencies not on approved frameworks.

The NHS TDA and Monitor followed up Hunt's speech with a letter to Trusts saying these caps would be trust specific with exact figures and put in place by September 2015. However the letter said the rules are only mandatory for trusts that had breached their financial licences.

During September, Trusts were issued with their individual ceilings for total agency spend. Monitor and NHS TDA also reiterated the mandatory use of frameworks for procuring temps. The amount individual agency staff can be paid per shift will be confirmed later this year following further review.

A Monitor spokesperson highlighted that the rules were still voluntary for Trusts that hadn't breached their financial licences or weren't in receipt of financial assistance under

section 42A of the National Health Service Act 2006. However, the spokesperson said it is still "strongly advised they are followed". He added that "Monitor's risk assessment framework would also enable the watchdog to enforce the new staffing agency rules".

The risk assessment framework is used by Monitor to assess whether Trusts are being poorly governed or whether there is a danger to the continuity of a trust's services. Monitor can then potentially take enforcement action if there is a danger of either of those things.

Ruth May, Nursing Director at Monitor, said: "Trusts are working hard to reduce the amount of agency staff they use, and this is something we're actively supporting through initiatives like our agency support team.

"We've worked hard with the NHS to develop this set of rules which will support boards and in particular chief nurses to reinvest the money currently spent on agency staff into providing the best care for patients. Today's guidance is another step in delivering a safe and secure NHS that will meet the needs of patients long into the future."

Source: www.healthinvestor.co.uk

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