

When we do harm

An Avoiding Harm discussion paper on improving our employee investigations



Andrew Cooper
Rhiannon Windsor
Neil Lewis

“As a profession, we have too often focussed on the delivery of the process and the needs of the organisation, without considering the impact on those involved.”

Julie Rogers, CEO, HPMA

#AvoidingHarm

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Why should you read this paper?

It could help the wellbeing of your colleagues

The paper looks at the impact of the disciplinary policies we follow on the employee under investigation. It also examines the impact on the people leading and supporting the process, including line managers, HR staff, witnesses and trade union representatives.

It summarises recent research on the issue and identifies new ways of managing investigations which support and protect the wellbeing of everyone involved.

It could help your organisational culture

Research shows that the way we manage investigations can have a negative impact on the culture of our organisations.

Read this paper and you may find there are better ways of managing investigations which help to foster the positive working culture we all want to work in.

It could help the reputation of your organisation

Studies show that, if we continue to run employee investigations the way we've been doing, our organisations can suffer from a more negative reputation. We know that this, in turn, affects recruitment, retention and patient confidence in our services.

It could help you reduce your costs

Read this paper and you may well find that you can enable your organisation to make significant financial savings.

This is because there are costs to running avoidable employee investigations – the cost of increased sickness absence, wasted HR and management time and, sometimes, legal advice and services.

So, please read on.

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Introduction

The issues raised in this paper have caused me to reflect on my own practice during my career.

I realise that I've made decisions – often driven by the process and training – which failed to consider the person at the heart of the investigation and the impact it could have on colleagues and the wider organisation.



Please don't read this the wrong way. Employee investigations are, and will remain, a necessary part of HR practice to address work place issues.

But, when we read Anne's story (on page 4), we must acknowledge that, sometimes, we do bad things to our staff. We don't mean to. We do it in the name of process.

This process can be costly, not just for the people who are being investigated and their families, but for those involved in delivering the investigations too – which includes members of our own profession.

As a profession, we have too often focussed on the delivery of the process and the needs of the organisation, without considering its impact on those involved. We need to change and ensure that our duty of care to those being taken through an investigation is equal to the delivery of it.

The first focus of HPMA's new 'Avoiding Harm' programme is on the impact of employee investigations. It's based on new academic research in this area and aims to support the change you and your organisation will hopefully want to make.

I'm grateful to our colleagues in NHS Wales for their work on this paper. It clearly builds on the work of others, including those at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, who have also been committed to addressing this area of avoidable employee harm.

Please play your part by reading this paper. Think about what you can do differently. Use the questions posed and the resources signposted to start a conversation within your own organisation today. And let us know how it goes and if there's any additional support you need by taking part in our '100 Conversations' (see page 5).

Julie Rogers, Chief Executive, HPMA



**Find out more about the
Avoiding Harm programme:**
www.hpma.org.uk/avoiding-harm

AVOIDING
HARM



Anne's story

Anne had worked for the NHS since she was 18 as a nurse and midwife. Over 37 years, she had held various roles, including running busy labour wards and supporting staff as they looked after expectant mums-to-be. She loved her job and, in speaking to her, you quickly realised that it was much more than a job: she had poured her life and a commitment to caring for others into it.

Revalidation query

She had planned to provide many more years of service – but a query over her revalidation (which should have been easily addressed), quickly spiralled into the worst experience of her working life. It led to an internal employee investigation and referral to her professional body – in which she was alleged to have committed serious misconduct by failing to follow the correct process.

Over the course of fifteen months, an internal process and external feedback from her professional body eventually concluded that there was no case to answer. The organisation's HR team even acknowledged that its formal disciplinary policy should never have been used to address the issue.

Isolated and unsupported

However, the damage had been done. Anne spoke about how the process and the way she had been treated had made her feel like a criminal. She felt isolated and unsupported by both her organisation and professional body, and suffered from chronic anxiety at the thought of returning to work at the end of the investigation.

The experience had broken her. Whilst she hadn't intended to take early retirement, she felt that it was the only option left open to her – bringing her NHS career to a painful and wasteful end. She observed: "To this day, I'm still not sure what it was all about. I'm not sure what I had done wrong, or what they were trying to achieve, by putting me through the process."

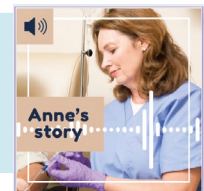
Sadly, this was a case of employee harm which could have been avoided.

"I'm not sure what I had done wrong, or what they were trying to achieve, by putting me through the process."



Use this audio of Anne's story to start a conversation with your colleagues.

<https://youtu.be/F06qioS-hcY>



Key questions:

- How do you listen to your people so you can improve your processes?
- How do you learn from the experience of people who have been taken through your processes?

Anne's story (not her real name) has been used with permission. The image is stock photography.

How you should use this paper

This paper asks some hard questions. In answering them, there are things you can do too, which will make a real difference for your colleagues and for your organisation.

If you are a member of a Board or Executive team ...

You could put the paper on the agenda at an away day or development session. Are there lessons here for the way your organisation runs its disciplinary processes? How do they affect the wellbeing of your colleagues? Do they align with the culture you are seeking to instil? Do they impact the reputation you want to develop?

If you are a member of an HR or OD team ...

You could schedule an hour for discussion at your next team meeting. Are your disciplinary policies and processes achieving the outcomes you would want? Are they in line with best professional practice? Could you review your employee relations data to inform the picture? How are you and your colleagues – business partners, investigating officers and witnesses – impacted by the processes you follow? If you're in OD, how can you support colleagues with this potential area of improvement?

If you are a line manager, an investigating officer or commissioner of investigations ...

You could set up a discussion with your HR business partner or another member of your supporting HR team. Do you get the time you need to commission an employee investigation? Do you have the time alongside your day job to manage an investigation? Have you thought about how it may impact you and your colleagues? Are you encouraged to be compassionate in the process? What is your duty of care?

If you are a trade union official, a witness or supporting colleague ...

You could discuss the paper with your colleagues and your HR team. Does your organisational policy and processes avoid any of the pitfalls or challenges the paper discusses? Could you improve those same policies and processes by applying the lessons learned from this paper?



Take part in '100 Conversations'

We are encouraging HPMA members to start a conversation in their organisations using this discussion paper. Let us know who you had the conversation with (board, executive team, HR colleagues), how it went and what steps you are taking to improve employee investigations where you work?

When you've had your conversation, use this online form to let us know how it's gone [<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6TRZY3R>] and we'll send you further resources to support your ongoing work in this area.



What is avoidable employee harm?

The first duty of healthcare workers is to do no harm.

We have long understood that the system we work in – the practices and processes – can cause harm.

Over the last three decades, the patient safety movement has developed an understanding of avoidable patient harm, reaching the point where it is a globally accepted and respected term in healthcare.

With an understanding of the term has come action to deal with it.

HR and harm

We are now beginning to understand that HR and management systems can also cause harm.

We know that the organisations we work for, the systems we operate in and the processes we follow can lead to the harm of the people we work with – which can often be avoided. Academics and practitioners have described this as Avoidable Employee Harm:

“Where harm occurs to employees because of an identifiable and modifiable workplace cause, the future recurrence of which is avoidable by reasonable adaptation, subsequent adherence to and thoughtful implementation of a workplace process or policy.” [1]

This definition includes, but doesn't just include, health and safety as we commonly think about it.

We all well understand the risks of a building site and the potential damage which can be caused by an office chair.

But what about work stress?

Well, we know that poorly managed organisational change can lead to staff sickness.

People suffer from workforce stress and uncertainty when change processes are poorly communicated. Or if they are considered unfair. Or if they take place too quickly or too slowly.

We also know that people who raise concerns about their work can end up feeling intimidated. The treatment they get can lead to psychological harm.



Employee harm in disciplinary processes

There is new and persuasive evidence of the damage done by employee investigations.

The stress of being told you've broken a rule and a subsequent investigation, if not handled with compassion and understanding, if not handled appropriately, or if strung out over too long a time, can lead to sickness. It can impact individual's families and affect their relationships inside and outside of work.

So, an organisation's policies, or the way they are implemented, can harm employees.

But the important point is that this harm can be avoided.

Adaptations can be made to existing policy or process and/or through adherence and thoughtful implementation of policies and processes.

The word 'avoidable' is also key to normalising a new approach. This is one which considers harms occurring to employees as preventable and tractable. It challenges beliefs that such harms are the inevitable 'cost of doing business' in complex healthcare and corporate contexts. And it doesn't accept that the failing practices and processes which contribute to avoidable employee harm are just unusual and isolated failures.

Preventing future harms

So, if we acknowledge the possibility of harm, if we define and categorise it, if we're curious about the impact of the way we do things and if we commit to improving, we can act to prevent it.



Watch the 'What is avoidable employee harm?' animation with colleagues as you reflect on the application of your policies and processes:

<https://youtu.be/UcB6vHdLk54>



"If we acknowledge the possibility of harm, if we're curious about the impact of the way we do things and if we commit to improving, we can take action which prevents it."

Key questions

- How could your organisation, its practices and processes, be causing harm to your colleagues?
- Could you use the definition of avoidable employee harm to help measure the harm in your organisation?

(1) When work harms: how better understanding of avoidable employee harm can improve employee safety, patient safety and healthcare quality.
BMJ Leader, 2023.

Do you understand the harm of employee investigations?

The Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) states that human resources policies can ‘provide consistency and transparency for employees and managers, helping to enhance the psychological contract and create a positive organisational culture.’

However, when these policies are not interpreted or implemented correctly, the effect can be highly damaging to both individuals and organisations.



Harm to your colleague

By their very nature, employee investigations will cause considerable anxiety and distress to the people who are being taken through them. [2]

Researchers have reported that an investigation may lead to “heightened anxiety, distress, confusion, mistrust and betrayal as well as trauma and depression” in someone.

This is made worse by the sense of isolation that investigations create. If the person is suspended or takes sickness leave because of the related psychological pressures, they may lose their supportive structures and relationships. [3]

Research has also shown that people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be the subject of employee investigations – and therefore disproportionately impacted by these harms. [4]

Harm to the culture of your organisation

Your organisational culture may be negatively impacted by the investigation process.

In every organisation people talk. Sensitive details related to a case are often known or exposed, particularly when the process is flawed or fails to be delivered compassionately.

A general view may emerge that your organisation does not manage this area of HR practice very well. Team members and colleagues may fear similar, detrimental treatment should they find themselves in a similar position.

Also, when the investigation is over, and if it didn’t conclude in a dismissal, the person who was being investigated may return to your organisation, often understandably bruised, bitter and hostile – creating a threat to your organisational culture. [3]

Harm to the reputation of your organisation

Employee investigations may also have an impact on your organisation's external reputation.

As we have said, people talk. And they talk outside of an organisation as well as internally.

If cases are pursued via an employment tribunal, ending in a public hearing, the details would be reported on the tribunal's website and may be picked up by the media. [2]

Public understanding of your organisation's culture and commitment to employee wellbeing can have a substantial impact on its recruitment potential and ability to retain staff. [3]

Harm to the finances and economic-related costs of your organisation

Employee investigations may have a significant economic impact on your organisation.

There are additional costs linked to related periods of sickness or suspension, backfilling roles, internal administration and the involvement of your senior staff.

There is a wider economic impact too. While your organisation is investing resources in unnecessary employee investigations, it cannot fully deliver on its organisational priorities. [5]

“By their very nature, employee investigations will cause considerable anxiety and distress to the people who are being taken through them.”



Harm to your patients' safety

A highly punitive culture (whether perceived or actual) may threaten psychological safety in your organisation. This may lead to a wider impact on patient safety and the delivery of care, both in terms of staff capacity and their confidence to challenge unsafe practice and behaviour.

(2) The impact of poorly applied human resources policies on individuals and organisations. British Journal of Healthcare Management, 2023.

(3) The organisational harm, economic cost and workforce waste of unnecessary disciplinary investigations. British Journal of Healthcare Management, 2024.

(4) Disproportionality in NHS Disciplinary Policy. British Journal of Healthcare Management, 2019.

(5) Employee investigations - the economic cost of 'excessive' HR processes and procedures. Gwella, Health Education and Improvement Wales Leadership Portal for Wales, 2023.

Key questions

- Have you reviewed your data on the management of employee investigations in your organisation?
- What are your governance and accountability arrangements to protect people from poorly managed processes and to enable learning to take place and lessons to be applied?

How are your investigators and HR colleagues affected?

Your HR colleagues have expertise and experience applying your disciplinary policies and procedures consistently and with rigour. This adds great value to your organisation.

This paper should not be seen as a criticism of their work when it is the underlying policy and its application which we are discussing.

For it's not just the employee and the organisation which may suffer from the harm of employee investigations. Everyone involved - HR colleagues, investigating officers, witnesses called to provide evidence, line managers and trade union representatives - may also suffer.



Negatively impacted

Recent research indicates that investigators can be negatively impacted, even harmed, when they conduct employee investigations. [6]

Investigators often see the distress that employees and colleagues experience when involved in the process. They may even sense how problems with the process can increase anxiety and potential trauma for the colleague who is being investigated.

When an organisation's response to mistakes and errors is to punish rather than learn, improve and restore – and the disciplinary policy becomes the hard edge of this – we see the potential for investigators to experience personal isolation, anxiety and distress.

Additionally, your HR professionals and investigating officers, people who are trained to manage and often lead challenging and complex investigation processes, can be presented with sensitive and distressing material.

They can be involved in stressful and traumatic situations, dealing with people who, themselves, are experiencing high levels of distress and anxiety.

Internal conflict

Your investigating officers may wrestle with an internal conflict. It's between the work they have to do (delivering an employee investigation) and the significant impact that it can have on those being taken through the process (often without a structured approach that provides an adequate duty of care).

One way, investigators may deal with potential distress is by depersonalising the colleague under investigation. They can even build an internal narrative that the person doesn't need or deserve the level of care they would like to provide.

They can also experience 'compassion fatigue', when individuals fail to consider the needs of others, often through a sense of being overwhelmed. Investigators' repeated exposure to the consequences of the process, without support to manage their own emotional wellbeing, is likely to lead to reduced empathy and compassion. This, in turn, detrimentally affects the future investigations they lead.

"Investigators can be negatively impacted, even harmed, when they conduct employee investigations."

Disciplinary investigators were asked if they were affected by their role in the application of the process. These were some of their replies:

"Stress - trying to support, whilst also following process."

"It can be hard to continue to do the day job and give advice when your advice is under question during an investigation. You can also feel for the employees involved."

"Anxiety and depression from others [and] suicidal tendencies in others [are main issues in investigations]. Very difficult to manage this."

"I can see the impact it has on colleagues going through an investigation."

"Stress levels increased. The team relationships/dynamics [were] affected before/during/after [the investigation]."

"The pressure to complete can result in increased stress levels (pressure from self as well as stakeholders)."

Key questions

- Does your organisation provide sufficient support to your colleagues who are responsible for investigations and involved in leading them?
- What support could you provide to ensure the wellbeing of investigators and, in turn, the individuals that are being investigated?

(6) Understanding the impact of employee investigations on those who lead them. Under review, 2024.

Should we rethink our policy?

Does your disciplinary policy need to be reviewed because of its potential to harm your employees and organisation?

We know that policies don't always translate well into practice – and their application can sometimes focus solely on the delivery of the process, with little consideration for its impact on employees. (7)

Developing a set of guiding principles to inform your review and shape a new version can be helpful in considering not only the purpose of your disciplinary policy – but how you want it to be applied.



Here are some suggestions for you to think about and discuss with colleagues. Are there any you would want to develop? Or are there others that you would include in your own set of guiding principles?

- 1 Acas code:** We will adhere to the Acas code to inform our approach and decisions – meeting the legal requirements and our obligations as an employer.
- 2 Person centric:** We will put the employee at the centre of the process – and consider, respect and respond to each person's needs and values. We recognise the bias evidenced against individuals from an ethnic minority background as well as those from other under-represented groups and will take action to prevent it.
- 3 Power balance:** We recognise the significant power differential and imbalance that exists between the employer and the employee during the investigation process. We will ensure that this insight informs our interactions with individuals being taken through the process.
- 4 Fair treatment:** We will follow the principles of fair treatment and natural justice. Everyone should have the opportunity of a fair hearing with the judgement made by someone who is impartial and an opportunity to appeal the decision.
- 5 Accessibility:** We will ensure that our policies and supporting documentation is written in an accessible way for all employees. We will appreciate the level of anxiety that people face and the impact of that anxiety on their behaviours and cognitive function during these processes.



“Developing a set of guiding principles to inform your review and shape a new version can be helpful in considering not only the purpose of your disciplinary policy – but how you want it to be applied.”

- 6 Pace and priority:** We will work with pace, running efficient investigations that minimise harm and costs to the individual and organisation – prioritising the delivery of the investigation process, regularly communicating the timelines to all involved.

- 7 Last resort:** We will encourage all our managers and disciplining officers to pursue alternative routes before proceeding with the formal process – ensuring that, wherever possible, it is only used as the last resort.

- 8 Information gathering:** We commit to gathering the widest available information to inform decision-making – as part of an initial assessment and continue to do so, should the case go forward to a formal investigation.

- 9 Complex systems:** We recognise that we work in complex systems and sometimes the presenting issue, may be a small part of a larger issue and this should be fully considered when initiating a disciplinary process.

- 10 Review and respond:** We will continually review the evidence gathered during an investigation, because new evidence can emerge and circumstances change. We will ensure that the process is able to respond to needs and changes as they arise.

Key questions

- Does your disciplinary policy and procedures highlight the potential harm they can cause and include advice and resources to mitigate the impacts?
- What are the other guiding principles you might add to this list? And how can you develop your own in discussion with your employees?

(7) An integrated framework for disciplinary processes and the application of employee investigations. Under review, 2024.

Can you make investigations a last resort?

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in NHS Wales changed its approach to employee investigations by making them a last resort.

The impact was dramatic. Investigations were reduced by 71 per cent over a 13-month period.

As a result, the health board estimates that it averted 3,308 sickness days over a year and made total annual savings of more than £738,000 (based on direct savings and costs averted). (8)

How did the health board make the change?

The key driver was recognising the harm that the disciplinary process can cause.

The health board developed an 'Improving employee investigations' intervention programme which involved:

Executive support

The programme gained executive endorsement for the last resort approach – providing managers with the confidence to implement it. Key stakeholders, including trade union representatives, were involved in the planning, to ensure that everyone understood the reasons for the change and were able to support them.

Assessment of impact

An impact assessment was undertaken to understand the impact of an investigation process on the individual as well as an organisation (its culture, reputation and finances) by drawing on a wide range of expertise. This included clinical and business psychology, employment law, general practice, quality improvement, HR and leadership development.

Review of data

The health board's HR team reviewed its employee relations data and discovered that over half of the investigations conducted over a 15-month period had led to no sanction. It had also become aware that the average length of an investigation was 265 days – highlighting the magnitude of wasted resource.

Initial assessment

The HR team updated their initial assessment document to collect as much information as possible to inform the decision about the need for a formal investigation. It considered factors such as intent and what previous informal approaches had been taken to address misconduct and improve learning opportunities.

Training

Training events, supported by senior leaders, included case studies to help attendees understand the impact of the investigation process. The events introduced the concept of avoidable employee harm, a new way of working and promoted alternatives to investigations to support the 'last resort' approach.

The training brought together HR, investigating officers, commissioners and trade union representatives enabling a wider and more informed conversation about the best way to manage workplace issues.



“The training introduced the concept of avoidable employee harm, a new way of working and promoted alternatives to investigations to support the ‘last resort’ approach.”

Values

Members of the HR operational team were encouraged to ensure both policy and related action was consistent with the organisation's values and that they were enacted throughout each investigation process.

Coaching

The HR team used coaching and influencing skills to encourage managers to identify alternative and informal routes that could be taken and answer any questions that colleagues had about the new approach.

Engagement and communication

Communication was essential in developing a narrative and presenting a solid case for change that engaged key stakeholders – consistently demonstrating the value of the changes and celebrating those supporting the new behaviours.

To find out more, you can read an evaluation of this programme here:

[The last resort: reducing avoidable employee harm by improving the application of the disciplinary policy and process.](#)

and further details are available from:

ABB.EmployeeWellbeing@wales.nhs.uk

Key questions

- What support would you need to make investigations a last resort?
- What do you think may be the barriers to this approach – and how could you overcome them?

(8) The last resort: reducing avoidable employee harm by improving the application of the disciplinary policy and process. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2024.

What help do you need?

There is a range of resources available to help you with your next steps to preventing avoidable employee harm.



Avoiding Harm resource hub

In support of our new 'Avoiding Harm' programme, we have created an online hub with blogs, the latest research and material to support you in your role and organisation.

The hub draws on lessons learnt from the patient safety movement and considers the impact of operating in complex environments, unintended consequences and the importance of understanding an employee's experience to inform our day-to-day practice.



Visit: www.hpma.org.uk/avoiding-harm



Online seminar - 'Improving employee investigations'

How could you improve the application of the disciplinary policy in your organisation and discover a more compassionate way to lead your employee investigations? If this discussion paper has raised more questions for you and you'd like to learn more, don't miss this new HPMA online event – 'Improving employee investigations.'

Join us for a 90 minute call to explore this subject further – and find out how lessons from the patient safety movement are being applied to HR and People practice through a focus on avoidable employee harm. You'll be able to join other colleagues from your HPMA branch area for an opportunity to consider how you could work together to improve the process for the benefit of your workforce and organisation too.



Make a note of the date that's been arranged for your branch area and book your place on the Avoiding Harm event web page. All sessions are running from 10am to 11.30pm. Book today: www.hpma.org.uk/avoiding-harm

Thursday 21 November: Scotland and Northern Ireland
 Thursday 28 November: South West and South Wales
 Thursday 5th December: East of England and London
 Thursday 30th January: East and West Midlands
 Thursday 13th February: Yorkshire and North East
 Thursday 6th March: North West and North Wales



What's next?

We hope this Avoiding Harm paper has provided you with new perspectives on how you might commission and conduct your employee investigations. Here are a few suggestions on what you could do to take further action:

- 1 Share this discussion paper with colleagues to gain their views and consider what the next steps could be for you and your organisation.
- 2 Arrange a session exploring the concept of 'avoidable employee harm' for your HR team as set out on pages 6-7. You could use Anne's story (page 4) and the avoidable employee harm animation (page 7) to support a conversation within the team.
- 3 What is your employee relations data telling you – particularly in relation to potential harm to your employees and organisation (as outlined on pages 8-9)?
- 4 Do you need to review your current disciplinary policy and process alongside the guiding principles set out on pages 12-13? Are changes needed to ensure a fairer and more compassionate approach?
- 5 What support is in place in your organisation for investigating officers, HR colleagues and others involved in the process to ensure their wellbeing (pages 10-11) and enable them to conduct efficient and compassionate investigations.
- 6 Could you explore taking a 'last resort' approach to the application of the disciplinary policy in your organisation, as set out on pages 14-15.



Do let HPMA know about your conversations and plans, using the '100 Conversations' form:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/6TRZY3R



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"As a profession, we have too often focussed on the delivery of the process and the needs of the organisation, without considering the impact on those involved."

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About the authors

Lead author:

Andrew Cooper – Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, NHS Wales

Andrew is Head of the Avoidable Employee Harm Programme in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and leads the 'Improving employee investigations' work across NHS Wales with Health Education and Improvement Wales. He is also leading a programme of research exploring the impact of the disciplinary process on individuals and organisations.

With a background in healthcare improvement and innovation, he has held senior communications roles across the private, public and voluntary sectors. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public

Relations for his contribution to healthcare communications, and an Honorary Research Fellow with the University of Plymouth.

Rhiannon Windsor – Health Education and Improvement Wales, NHS Wales

Rhiannon is Assistant Director of Organisation Development, Wellbeing and Inclusion at Health Education and Improvement Wales and leads the Compassionate People Practices work for NHS Wales.

She is a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD having spent over 20 years in the HR profession in NHS Wales. An advocate for restorative justice, she is currently co-chairing a review of the NHS Wales Disciplinary Policy, in partnership with key stakeholders and was part of the working group that developed Healthy Working Relationships, which saw the traditional grievance approaches replaced with a policy promoting respect and resolution.

Neil Lewis – Public Health Wales, NHS Wales

Neil is director of People and Organisational Development in Public Health Wales and chair of the Welsh branch of the Healthcare People Management Association (HPMA).

He is a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD and has worked in the public sector for 24 years including in policing and local government.



Employee Investigations

- *make them the last resort*

Employee relations investigations can cause real harm to those being investigated – as well as those involved in the process.

They can harm our organisation's culture and reputation and divert time and resources from meeting the needs of our patients and communities.

If you're considering whether an investigation is the right step: please think twice! Does the situation require a formal approach – or can it be addressed in another way?

Things to consider

Start with an informal conversation with the person concerned. Often situations can be addressed sensitively and quickly, without the need for a formal process.

If you think an investigation may be necessary – undertake a detailed initial assessment. This will ensure you have the facts to make the best decision on whether to proceed or not.

If you are starting an investigation – don't forget to build in review points. And be prepared to change direction if new evidence emerges or the situation calls for a change of course.



About the HPMA

The Healthcare People Management Association (HPMA) is the professional voice of people professionals in health and care across the UK.

PO Box 343, Lytham St Annes, FY8 9JF Tel: 0300 365 5560
Website: www.hpma.org.uk



About the Avoiding Harm programme

HPMA's 'Avoiding Harm' programme acknowledges the impact that the application of policies and processes can have on the health and care workforce. The first focus of the programme is on 'Avoiding harm in employee investigations'. It considers the damage that can occur, to both employees and organisations, when they are poorly commissioned and managed.

The 'When we do harm' discussion paper has been produced by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Health Education and Improvement Wales (NHS Wales) and draws on research, insight and learning from its national 'Improving employee investigations' programme.