



Hello!

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Well, there's no denying it's been a very strange few months for us all. Appraisal re-started on 1st October and there's lots to share, so please do take a few minutes to read our Autumn newsletter. Look after yourselves.

2020 CONFERENCES: Another successful year!

Last year, for the first time, two separate Appraiser Conferences were held, the first at the RNLI College in Poole in Dorset and the second at Highfield Park in Hook in Hampshire. Those who attended the Hants event may remember the horrendous weather conditions on the day... Well this year, the weather didn't matter! The venues were our own comfortable homes and offices, connected to one another by the wonder of MS Teams. We considered cancelling the events but decided to press ahead after feedback from many of our appraisers who were keen to attend a virtual 2020 Conference and to interact with their colleagues from across the region. So once again, we held two events, this time to cater for busy diaries and to provide two options to attend – and lots of you did!

Just like many of you, we're no experts at using remote platforms, and we've had to learn fast - but learn we did. From our perspective, the events were a big success, and your subsequent feedback confirms this. The conference practice exercise enabled you to build your own confidence in remote appraising, and to use the new supportive **Medical Appraisal 2020** process. Happily, all of you have now completed your appraisal 2020 update training and most have already started! Initial feedback about the value of your support from appraisees has been very positive.

Save the date

We've already decided on provisional conference dates for next year and would encourage you all to attend. It's an enjoyable, informative day and it helps to calibrate your practice outside your support group. The dates are **Wednesday 8th and Thursday 23rd September 2021** – venues (virtual or real) will be dependent on circumstances. Please bear in mind that you are welcome to attend either conference, regardless of where you are based and/or do most of your work.



Don't wish it was easier;
wish you were better.

Don't wish for less problems;
wish for more skills.

Don't wish for less challenge;
wish for more wisdom.

Jim Rohn





Medical Appraisal 2020: What You Need To Know

A little clarification:

It absolutely does not need to be said that these are completely unprecedented times, and medical professionals are currently needed 'at their posts' more than ever. In addition, time off work should be used to relax and recover, not do administrative tasks. In recognition of this, the Medical Appraisal process during the 2020/21 year has a dramatic reduction in the requirement for pre-appraisal focused written reflection and a shift in focus to support that reflects the impact of the pandemic. Since the restart in October 2020, appraisal has been implemented with more flexibility than we have had before.

What does this 'flexibility' mean?

Appraisal is still mandatory - Responsible Officers have a legal obligation to provide an annual appraisal opportunity to every eligible doctor in their designated body. They feel that a supportive appraisal should be viewed as an opportunity to benefit from some therapeutic reflection on what's gone before, what's happening at present, and thoughts/aspirations for the future, all with a fully-trained and supportive peer - so it is not an 'opt-in' process. Even doctors under extreme pressure should be able to find 30 minutes to do the focused written reflection beforehand and 2-3 hours for their appraisal. The appraisal you provide is an opportunity to seek advice and help at a highly critical time. You can signpost them to resources and/or make anonymous enquiries to ensure that all and any issues are effectively managed. It must always be remembered that appraisal is also about duty of care to the public; a medical professional struggling to cope is one at risk of making costly mistakes.

Appraisees will be contacted by Wessex Appraisal Service as usual to arrange their remote appraisal with you. As always, we encourage you to contact them to make the whole process as easy as possible for both of you. There is significantly more flexibility to find a date and time that is mutually



convenient, even if this means pulling an appraisal forward or pushing it back into a different month – all without needing to complete a postponement form (as this is seen as additional bureaucracy that is unnecessary in these circumstances). However, as always, an appraisal cannot simply be missed without reason. A doctor who is unable to have their appraisal needs a proper record and the Service and NHSE Area Office want to know as soon as the possibility of needing to miss the appraisal is raised - so that they can understand the circumstances and offer appropriate alternative support if necessary. The threshold for the Responsible Officer to agree an 'Approved Missed' appraisal seems likely to be much lower than in previous (or future) years, but appraisals are still a professional responsibility that all doctors should engage with.

Please ask your appraisees to complete the feedback request

We'd also like to stress the importance of completing feedback on the Appraisal 2020 experience. We would be grateful if you could remind your appraisees to do this; each and every feedback is looked at and, where necessary, acted upon. Without knowing where we excel or fall short, we cannot improve. In addition, we'd like to know if the new Appraisal 2020 format is an improvement on the previous system and therefore worth keeping in the long-term; any and all feedback we receive will be essential in making this decision.



Quality Assurance: New Tool 'SUPPORTS' for 2020/21

A revised QA tool: 'SUPPORTS' has been devised to replace PROGRESS. On our website, you'll find an editable Word document and a pdf for easy viewing and/or printing. We plan to QA each Appraiser's first completed appraisal documentation, so please do acquaint yourselves with it [HERE](#).

Please Follow Us

It's often easier for us to get messages out to our audience via social media. It means we don't have to fill up your inboxes and saves you having to trawl your emails. We have a great [website](#) full of useful information and resources, and we have also recently joined [LinkedIn](#). As ever, we can also be found on [Twitter](#). If you regularly use any of these platforms, please do follow us!



CPD requirement 2020/21:

Now that you have attended an Annual Conference and/or update meeting to rehearse the skills and familiarise yourself with the new materials, there is no need for further documented appraisal-related CPD in the 2020-21 appraisal year. Despite this, our Senior Appraisers will continue to run interesting and informative Support Group sessions which we hope that you will be keen to attend. They will provide time to connect with your peers and calibrate your work in the new process. We are looking forward to sharing our experiences and learning. For example, the Appraisal 2020 template alone is insufficient pre-appraisal documentation – it does need to be attached to a toolkit or the [adapted MAG4.2 for 2020](#)

Second-hand Anxiety: Protect yourself while helping others

Anxiety is very common at the best of times, but many thousands of people are, understandably, suffering extreme stress at the moment. Coping with anxiety can be incredibly difficult, and there are lots of useful resources and strategies available. But what if you yourself aren't generally prone to anxiety? How can you avoid absorbing some of the worry and panic that those around you are feeling and/or sharing with you? How can you prevent 'compassion fatigue'? If you expect the situation – ie you are a medical professional meeting often with stressed and/or anxious patients – ensure you are relaxed and mentally prepared beforehand. If you are caught off-guard, schedule some time to process and re-balance afterwards. It's vital to try to 'cleanse' your own mind as you go. It may sound basic, but other people's worries can slowly overwhelm and drain you - you have your own issues to deal with! Please don't neglect yourself in the process of helping others.

New Appraiser Training Virtual NAT arrives in Wessex

The Training Team is very excited to be venturing into world of virtual training for the first time in our Service history, with the first two-part **New Appraiser Training** event taking place on the 13th and 24th November.

Minimum Notice Period if resigning as an appraiser

We know that some of you will be considering your role as an appraiser around this time, and may be thinking about resigning. We hope you won't but, if you do, please try to let us have a minimum of three months' notice where possible. This will ensure that we do not notify doctors that they have been allocated to you unnecessarily.

Clarification: Support for your summaries:

You will have received an email about the offer to have any write-up of a "new Medical Appraisal 2020" reviewed by your Senior Appraiser before sign-off. **This is not mandatory**, and really only needs to be done if feedback is required for a particular problem with the new process, or with the appraisal. Early feedback is that the documentation seen so far has been completed just as we would have expected, to the same high standards as normal, with a great emphasis on support for the doctors you are appraising. Our two-week reminder notification is automated; it is not meant to be a stressor – we just want to remind you that we will provide support, should there be any problems with getting an appraisal signed off within the 28-day timeframe. If your draft is with your Senior Appraiser, simply contact them. We are all here to support you and your appraisees.

New Contract on IoW An exciting opportunity for you?

We are delighted that an additional Service Level Agreement has been put in place to provide interim appraisal leadership support to the Isle of Wight across the whole ICS, plus 24 appraisals for Senior Clinicians within the Trust. If you have the capacity to assist us with these remote Appraisals, please let us know.



National Performers' List

Just a gentle reminder that it is your own responsibility to ensure your details are accurate and kept up-to-date on the NPL. Visit our website [HERE](#) for more information and a useful link.

DR SUSI CAESAR
Regional Director

01962 690367 / 07974 966141
susi.caesar@hee.nhs.uk

DR STEPHANIE HUGHES
Deputy Service Lead

MS Teams or 07718 392977
stephanie.hughes@hee.nhs.uk

GILL WATSON
Programme Manager

MS Teams or 01962 690411
gill.watson@hee.nhs.uk

JOOLS MUMFORD
PA/Administrator

MS Teams or 01962 690414
jools.mumford@hee.nhs.uk

APPRAISAL ADMINISTRATORS:

SARAH LANG

Basingstoke, Blackwater,
Bournemouth & Poole,
Gibraltar, Guernsey & Training
MS Teams or 01962 690412
sarah.lang@hee.nhs.uk

DAVID SHILL

Dorset, New Forest,
Eastleigh & Test Valley South,
OlderCare, Independents, & IT
MS Teams or 01962 690408
david.shill@hee.nhs.uk

CHRIS DAVIS

Southampton, Isle of Wight,
Mid Hants, Portsmouth, Jersey,
& Superannuation
MS Teams or 01962 690409
chris.davis@hee.nhs.uk

PENNY HOCKLEY

East Hants, Fareham & Gosport,
PRAHS, and Wessex Fertility
MS Teams or 01962 690433
penny.hockley@hee.nhs.uk

We are always here if you need us

A lot has changed for the Wessex Appraisal Service Team over the last few months. Like so many others, we are all currently working from home, and there are no immediate plans to return to our offices at Southern House. However, our service has remained efficient and effective, and we are all available just as we always have been so, in most respects, not much has changed. We all have the same email addresses, updated telephone numbers, and can be contacted during normal office hours via MS Teams for a voice call or video call (see left for updated contact details). Please note that the NHS does not consider Zoom to be secure enough at present, therefore we adhere to this by

using MS Teams for all professional contact. Remember though, with regard to appraisal, **no platform is stipulated**; the method of contact is agreed solely between Appraiser and Appraisee, and this can be Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype, Webex, etc, as long as both parties are in safe, secure, private and professional surroundings at their respective venues. You'll find lots of information about remote appraisals and other topics on our website [HERE](#). While we won't get involved in setting up any meetings, we are happy to assist appraisers with advance dummy runs/trial video meetings if that's of use – please do just get in touch if you'd like to try this.

Goodbye... And Welcome! Some New Faces

In the Admin Team, Tara Whittington left for Maternity Leave at the end of September, and **Penny Hockley** (top right) joined us to provide cover. Penny will be looking after East Hants, Fareham & Gosport, PRAHS, and Wessex Fertility. It's lovely to have her with us, albeit remotely, and she is already a valued member of our close-knit team.



Senior Appraiser for Dorset, Dr Alex Jones, left us at the end of October, and **Dr Andie Siggers** (bottom right) took over the role. Hand-over began early and we hope transition has been seamless. We thank Alex for her two years of hard work and look forward to working with Andie.



Congratulations!

We would like to extend our very best wishes to Tara Whittington and her husband Simon, who welcomed their second child, baby Louisa on 8th October, a little sister for Edward. Everything went smoothly and all are doing well.

We'd also like to celebrate the incredible achievements of our own Dr Karen Gregory, Senior Appraiser for Eastleigh, Test Valley and the New Forest who, despite the challenges of a global pandemic, has succeeded in completing 3 marathons in the last year, and raised a large amount of money for **Against Breast Cancer** in the process. Truly inspirational!

Appraisal Professional Support Unit

We understand that anyone can feel overwhelmed at any time. If you would like support, advice, or guidance and/or need someone to just listen in confidence, don't struggle alone - please contact our **APSU** via email at Appraisal.WX@hee.nhs.uk and we will get back to you as soon as we can.



Useful Contacts for
NHS England South:

Responsible Officer SE (Hants/IOW): **Shahed Ahmad** englandwessexpcp@nhs.net
Responsible Officer SW (Dorset): **Caroline Gamlin** caroline.gamlin@nhs.net