

CASE STUDY:

CYGNET HEALTHCARE

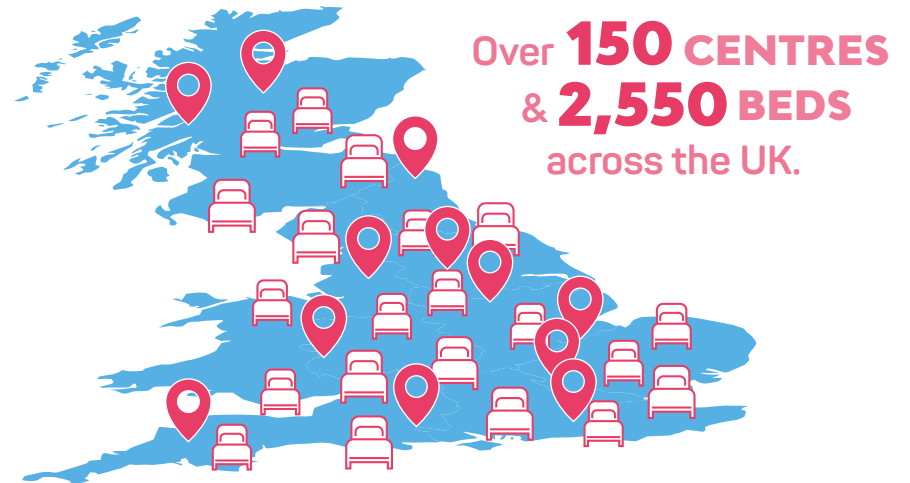


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Introduction

Established in 1988, Cygnet Health Care is an independent provider of mental health services with over 150 centres and 2,500 beds across the UK. They specialise in delivering services for individuals with mental health needs, autism and learning disabilities.

Values of integrity, trust, empower, respect and care guide all services that are provided. In 2021, an investigation was conducted to resolve a complex case between two employees. The case serves as an example of the damaging ramifications when issues are allowed to escalate. Working cultures clashed, showing the importance of clear underlying values to avoid conflicting management.





As a former Detective Chief Inspector with the Metropolitan Police, Rachael Stiddard is a highly trained and experienced interviewer with principles of compassion and care. Working with vulnerable witnesses and victims has defined much of her career, resulting in her expertise in public protection, professional standards and misconduct.

With her wealth of experience and personal approach, Rachael was chosen to conduct this investigation involving a sensitive case. She has worked extensively with Healthcare Trusts, lending her specific knowledge to this sector.

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Targeting issues

In May 2021, the Complainant raised a grievance against a member of another team within the organisation. The Complainant resided in the clinical team and the Complained-of worked in the operations team - two mismatched sides of the same business. Both teams were governed by unclear policies and procedures, with contradicting best practice, exacerbated by pressures of ongoing external inspections. The operations member was in charge of ensuring that the inspection was passed and the clinical employee oversaw the giving of care, encountering a clash of vested interest.

The complaint was formally made due to an undermining of professionalism. Emails were sent back and forth that were personally detrimental. All issues were viewed from a position of prejudice, with neither party able to view the situation objectively.

As the investigation went on, a grievance between two managers evolved into a wider cultural issue. Cygnet Health Care merged two companies several years ago, with different working practices, meaning that values were not streamlined when the merging commenced. Since the formation of Cygnet, underlying contention had been brewing until boiling point.

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Conducting an investigation

In June 2021, the Complainant raised a formal grievance in relation to the conduct of the operations manager, and The TCM Group were commissioned to undertake an independent, objective, investigation. The history of a difficult working relationship was acknowledged in understanding the case.

The Investigator, Rachael Stiddard, was assigned to the case and heard account of the grievance. Allegations surmised that the Complainant had been undermined by the Complained-of with four specific incidents as evidence of this. Throughout the investigation, Rachael interviewed both parties with additional witness accounts and documentary evidence. The Cygnets Code of Conduct policy and the Cygnets Harassment and Bullying policy were taken into consideration when conducting the investigation.

All interviews were conducted remotely in line with COVID-19 guidelines. Notes made by the investigator were reviewed by both parties to ensure a true and accurate reflection of the case. Amendments were then captured and final versions sent to both parties. The Investigator viewed a range of documents including emails, minutes of meetings and job descriptions detailing the roles and responsibilities of individuals.



An employment investigation uses the balance of probabilities to decide whether the incident was more likely to have occurred than not. Rachael interviewed six witnesses alongside the involved parties to gain a wider perspective of the incidents. Using the balance of probabilities, the Investigator found two of four allegations to have a case to answer, providing recommendations for the organisation to follow to improve the situation. The main cause for concern was found to be a wider disconnect within the company as a result of a previous merger. Cultures and working practices were in conflict, with an organisational split stifling employee productivity, wellbeing and engagement.

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Creating change

Going forward, Rachael made three suggestions:

The Complainant and Complained-of should undertake mediation to improve their working relationship. Due to the history of a broken bond between the two parties, without intervention, it would be possible to revert to this circumstance. Failing to mend the relationship could impact the parties personally and the organisation's service delivery.

Team facilitation between the clinical team and the operations team would help to merge the two sides of the business, enabling everyone to adapt to the change in structure. Whilst interviewing various witnesses, Rachael found that both sides faced challenges in working collaboratively and maintaining effective working relationships with each other. As such, the grievance was seen as symptomatic of a wider disconnect within the organisation.

A clear understanding and outlining of roles and responsibilities would lessen the general sense of confusion amongst employees. One employee was found to not have a job description, which Rachael suggests to be addressed for clarity.

In summary, the neutral evaluation found supporting evidence to the original whistle-blowing allegations, uncovering underlying issues and emotions felt across the team. Above all, the assessor seeks to promote cultural change and a reinforcement of company values to challenge negative behaviours and set boundaries for staff conduct.

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