

Op NOVA Service Visit 2024: Life-changing support for veterans in the justice system 24.07.24, Kent Police Training College, Coverdale Avenue, ME18 9DR

Keynote Speaker Summary: NHS England

Delivered by: Kate Davies CBE, Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces and Sexual Assault Services Commissioning, NHS England

There is no solution without coming together as one.

“For many veterans, leaving the Armed Forces and going through the justice system can be a complex journey. What we need to do is support the navigation of that process. There is no solution without coming together as one.”

Op NOVA champion Kate Davies CBE opened her session by reflecting on the original need for Op NOVA under the Health and Care Act 2022 and Commitment Six of the NHS England’s Armed Forces Forward View.

Kate explained that these commitments are not just objectives; they comprise a “delivery commitment that is absolutely cited” in the legislature and in the policy and publication of the Armed Forces Forward View.

As the driver of these commitments, Kate stressed that her team’s direction was to “assure, improve and deliver” healthcare services to those in police custody, courts and prison through properly commissioned, informed programmes, rather than pilots or trials.

Having been the national NHS England Armed Forces health commissioning director since 2013 and working closely with the justice sector for over 30 years, Kate has “no hesitation in advocating and supporting” active collaborations between police, lived experience groups, the Armed Forces community, and healthcare services.

From this foundation, Kate laid out the future vision for Op NOVA, the “fourth piece of the NHS Armed Forces suite” that also comprises Op Courage, Op Restore, and Op Community. This NHS Armed Forces suite is important for the veteran community, and we should continue to develop it to support positive user health and wellbeing outcomes.

“It is really important that we collaborate to make this suite as simple as possible in terms of access points, whether that’s self-referral, referral at arrest, through voluntary organisations or, importantly, at any point further down the line in the justice system”.

Kate observed that this collaboration is vital for Op NOVA to proactively respond to the challenges of the changing political climate and the implications of SDS40 on an overstretched sector.

“Under any government, it is important that Op NOVA is understood at the highest level. We are now at a really important point in time in ensuring that the positive impact of Op NOVA on the Armed Forces community is understood and that its sustainability, growth, change and development are assured.”

Right now, we are facing a pressurised crisis point within the justice system, felt throughout the sector from policing to custody and probation. This crisis is mirrored in the NHS, but “with crisis, comes opportunity”, and with SDS40 there comes a great opportunity to emphasise the impact of services, such as Op NOVA and RECONNECT.

Kate’s final comments reaffirmed and underlined the need to collaborate to promote the sustainability, growth and development of Op NOVA.

“It’s about reaching out and finding the opportunities and ways to develop the service throughout the justice system. This will help to identify, support and improve the support offered to veterans and their families. It will also help to deliver on our objective to reduce offending behaviour, improve health equalities and raise individual health, well-being and attainment.”

If you are in the health/justice sector and would like to connect with Op NOVA to arrange an intro session for staff or refer a veteran, get in touch and become part of the solution.

About Kate Davies CBE:

Kate is the National Director for healthcare services across England for Armed Forces Serving personnel, veterans and their families; sexual assault referral centres (SARCs); and prisons, immigration removal centres, secure children’s homes and training centres. Her national role is to assure high-quality, consistent and sustained services with a strong focus on health inequalities and outcomes for patients and their families. She is also the NHS England lead for cross-departmental work in this area and has developed and led the national partnership agreement with the Ministry of Defence, which defines the strategic vision, aims, interactions and governance that allow for mutually supporting work and relationships across health services commissioning for the Armed Forces community.

