Morale within the NHS was low before COVID-19 caused confusion, fear and loss of direction. Morale became more important to ensure the ability to navigate this difficult challenge. My role as Chief Registrar was to link executive and junior medical teams. The key to my strategy was early and continued stakeholder engagement.

We identified the ability to communicate with junior medical staff as a weakness. The Trust did not have a list of all junior doctors, or a way to communicate with them. I set up a ‘WhatsApp’ group for all junior medical staff and through this, organised daily video conferences led by a member of the senior clinical team. These conferences included updates on hospital status and guidelines which were then summarised into a text update for those unable to attend. This flexible approach was devised and implemented within a week.

The working environment plays a pivotal role and well-being is impacted by access to food and rest. We arranged free food and access to the Doctors Mess, free parking, shower facilities and a ‘wobble room’, where people could go if they felt overwhelmed. We coordinated strategies alongside the Trust wellbeing team and recruited a GP, with psychiatry experience to be available for telephone consultations daily.

We used online surveys to assess the impact of our intervention collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Over 80% of junior doctors felt supported during the pandemic and reported a reduction in anxiety.

Change can happen effectively even during a crisis within a complex system. The morale of the medical workforce has a direct impact on patient safety and the quality of care delivered. The Chief Registrar role has enabled me to lead from within, which is an effective way to implement change by being an authentic voice from within an organisation.