Nearly one third of NHS employees do not agree that they would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice, according to the 2014 NHS staff survey.

The survey results, published today, paint a picture of increasing pressure on those who work within the health service.

Of the survey’s 29 “key findings”, 15 have deteriorated since last year, 11 have improved, one has remained the same, and two cannot be compared due to changes in the questions.

Sixty-four per cent of staff surveyed said if a friend or relative needed treatment they would be happy with the standard of care provided by their organisation, a slight decrease on the 65% recorded in 2013.

“It is unacceptable for any member of staff to be attacked when all they are trying to do is help people”

Christina McAnnea

Picker Institute Europe, which carried out the survey, said the fall was “concerning” because the measure is strongly related to patient experiences of care.

Fifty-six per cent of staff said they would recommend their organisation as a place to work, down from 58% in 2013.
There was a marked decrease in the number of staff satisfied with their level of pay, from 38% in 2013 to 33% this year, representing the first drop in pay satisfaction since 2011.

Only 29% felt there are enough staff for them to do their jobs properly, down one percentage point on the previous year.

In a new question introduced to the survey, only 68% of staff agreed with the statement that they would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice. Only 57% said they would be confident that their organisation would address their concern.

Nearly one quarter of staff (24%) said they had experienced bullying, harassment or abuse from a line manager or another colleague, a slight increase from 23% the previous year.

“The results this year show staff reporting increased pressure because of significant challenges facing the health service”

Danny Mortimer

More positively, 67% of staff said patient care was their organisation’s top priority, compared to 66% in 2013 and only 62% in 2012.

The proportion of staff reporting they felt pressure to work while feeling unwell fell markedly, from 68% in 2013 to 65% in 2014.

The 2014 NHS Staff Survey involved 287 NHS organisations in England. Over 624,000 NHS staff were invited to participate in the survey. The response rate was 42%, slightly down from the 49% in 2013.

Neil Churchill, director of patient experience at NHS England, said the national averages masked “striking differences in staff experience between different hospitals and other NHS employers”.

The NHS Employers organisation acknowledged that the survey showed “growing pressure on those working in the NHS”, but also noted that the vast majority of staff remained positive about their work and the service they provide.

Danny Mortimer, chief executive of NHS Employers, said: “Anyone exploring these findings each year will appreciate the tremendous resilience of NHS organisations and their staff.

“The results this year show staff reporting increased pressure because of significant challenges facing the health service,” he said. “The variation in staff experience remains a real concern.”

Unison head of health Christina McAnea claimed it was “clear” that nothing had been done in the last 12 months “to ease the pain of health workers”.

“More workers are dissatisfied with their level of pay this year than the previous year,” she said. “And with so many feeling undervalued, not listened to, and provided with so little support, it is no surprise that fewer would recommend the NHS as a place to work.

Ms McAnea added: “It is also worrying that more than a third of staff questioned this year would be unhappy with the standard of care provided by their organisation should a friend or relative need treatment.

“And there are still way too many staff experiencing bullying, harassment and violence at work,” she said. “It is unacceptable for any member of staff to be attacked when all they are trying to do is help people.”
Jagtar Dhanda, head of Inclusion at Macmillan Cancer Support, said the findings depicted a “picture of an NHS in England which still struggles to support, value and invest in the wellbeing and development of its staff”.

“Despite staff well-being remaining a high profile topic over the last few years, it seems that very little has actually changed in the working culture of the NHS,” he said.

“We are particularly concerned to see that a third (33%) of NHS staff say that the care of patients is not their organisation’s top priority, whilst half (50%) still say they haven’t had any training in the last year on how to deliver a good experience to patients, such as how to have sensitive conversations,” he added.