

Improving staff retention – case studies

Creating a sustainable career pathway

Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS FT

What was the problem?

An increasing rate of staff turnover coupled with challenges in recruiting enough nurses to cover the vacancies. The trust knew that they would have to introduce new ways to improve their recruitment and retention issues, acknowledging that they are a general hospital situated equidistant from two large cities with numerous inner-city teaching hospitals and tertiary centres.

After reviewing their current workforce data, including analysis of the data by age and profile, they identified that 'limited career progression' and 'limited continual professional development' were cited as the two main reasons for nurses leaving, particularly in the 21-39-year-old age group.

What was the solution?

The trust chose to develop an attractive offer to encourage recruitment and prevent existing nurses moving to neighbouring trusts. Their objectives were to:

- improve recruitment and retention
- reduce turnover by 1.5% in 12 months
- develop a sustainable clinical career pathway
- formulate a multidisciplinary core competency framework aligned to the trust's values, defining a Warrington 'standard of care'
- offer specialist interest development with the implementation of the registered nurse with a special interest.



The trust held a series of physical and virtual engagement sessions where staff told them what they wanted. The main points noted were:

- improved development opportunities
- better career progression
- removal of career 'glass ceilings'
- greater continuity of care
- workforce motivation
- improved patient experience.

With this feedback, they then developed a clinical career pathway to provide opportunities for nursing staff to progress from apprentice to advanced care practice.

To start with, the team needed to interrogate their workforce data which included nurse turnover, reasons for leaving and age profile, looking into the views of their workforce. This was undertaken for both existing and those staff who had left the organisation, to understand what staff really wanted from the trust and what would encourage them to stay and develop. From this data, they built an impressive targeted improvement plan.

A Nursing and Midwifery Recruitment and Retention group was established, chaired by the chief nurse. This provided strategic oversight and a governance structure for the programme, using a multidisciplinary approach with colleagues from the senior nursing team, advanced clinical practice strategic lead, human resource and the clinical education teams.

They chose to use a 'bottom up' approach to engage nurses to set the priorities for their own development. This was conducted using roadshows, careers clinics, online questionnaires and visits to specific clinical areas. Using this feedback and the workforce data, the group then developed the Warrington and Halton Hospitals (WHH) clinical career pathway for nurses – underpinned by a programme of development all the way to advanced practice.

The programme was initially introduced for Bands 5 to 8b, with the next step to focus support on the wider workforce, for them to become familiar with advanced practice concepts, core competency framework and the introduction of aspirational development roles. By accessing the apprentice levy funding and engaging higher education partners they were able to develop appropriate apprentice models. Finally, an internal academy of advanced and

specialist practice was created to support and nurture professional skills development across the trust.

What were the results?

Since implementing the career development pathway, they have experienced:

- a reduction in registered nurse turnover by 2.55% in the last eight months
- an increase in the number of internal promotions over the last 12 months
- staff survey response rate increased from 46% in 2017 to 51% in 2018 – with the nursing cohort reporting significant improvements in both the safety culture in the organisation and staff engagement.

The trust also chose to join the 'Listening into Action' programme in order to further develop both staff engagement and a culture of quality improvement. After joining this, WHH turned in the highest-ever response rate to a first stage pulse survey at 73%, with over 2,000 ideas submitted by staff relating to patient quality and safety improvements and enhancements. Within one year they have seen a significant shift within the top right quartile, making them one of the highest performing trusts in the country.

What were the challenges?

Some of the challenges faced by the trust were:

- Engagement of the multiprofessional team – however, the multidisciplinary recruitment and retention group provided the perfect forum to pull everyone together and to ensure each specialist area had input into the programme.
- Ensuring there was a clear and consistent message across the organisation. This was tackled by having a communication plan which included utilising various forums to share the message. These included traditional meetings and forums, establishing career clinics and utilising social media platforms eg Facebook and Twitter.
- Empowering and engaging ward leaders to support development – to support managers in achieving success in developing staff, a number of 'Brilliant Basics' masterclasses were developed. All ward managers undertook a development programme led by the chief nurse and senior nursing team. Lastly, a retention masterclass day was held with ward managers sharing the great progress and achievements they had made.

What were their learning points?

- Consistently use and monitor their data to inform priorities, improve staff engagement and belief in the trust and the programme.
- You do not have to be a large teaching or inner city hospital to make tangible and meaningful improvements for staff.
- The trust could more innovatively make use of the apprenticeship levy to build staff development programmes without needing additional investment.
- The need to recognise, celebrate and share their successes at individual, team, ward and organisation level. In doing so, word of mouth became a powerful driver in recruitment.

Next steps and sustainability

- To continue to build on the great progress and successes to strengthen the preceptorship programme.
- To offer a development programme once nurses have completed their preceptorship programme.
- To undertake and develop a programme for non-trained health care assistant staff leading up to registered nurse status.
- Continued strengthening and use of data at trust and ward level.

Want to know more?

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To see the other case studies in this series: visit the NHS England and NHS Improvement website: <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/improving-staff-retention/>

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