

Improving staff recruitment and retention in emergency departments – case study

How creative recruitment supported Princess Royal University Hospital's emergency department

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

What was the problem?

The Princess Royal University Hospital's emergency department (ED), in Orpington, Kent, experienced significant staff shortages. These in turn resulted in high use of temporary staffing and unfilled shifts. This was especially apparent during winter, when ED staff turnover and vacancy rates were high.

What was the solution?

The trust reviewed skill-mix and establishment, introducing new roles into the department, including healthcare support workers and, in the clinical decision unit (CDU), a trainee nurse associate. Staffing was mapped to times of activity and altered so it was appropriate across 24 hours.

The organisation had a well-established pipeline for recruiting internationally educated nurses (IENs), but the ED had not used it despite many IENs having acute and emergency experience. To ensure the IENs coming into ED were not overwhelmed, the trust:

- picked nurses with significant ED experience in their own countries
- treated them similarly to preceptors – they were given intensive support over six months, including ED-specific transition study days.

In addition, the trust organised three 'transfer windows' a year. These allowed Band 5 staff nurses to transfer to other areas within the organisation. The trust agreed to a Princess Royal ED internal recruitment campaign across its sites for staff to transfer to ED during the window.

The department also piloted a trainee nursing associate post in the CDU to see if a different workforce solution was possible.

What were the challenges?

Actively recruiting into the Band 5 vacancies meant the ED had numerous starters who were relatively junior.

Although the IENs were experienced in their own countries, the transition to working in ED in the UK was challenging, especially during winter.

This was mitigated by:

- identifying an additional clinical practice facilitator (CPF) from within the Band 6 role, funded by a vacant post
- specifically tasking the two CPFs with developing the new starters (especially as the department had no new preceptors)
- the practice development nurse and the Band 7 senior sisters providing clinical, shop-floor support to the new starters (especially the IENs), to demonstrate good practice through role modelling.

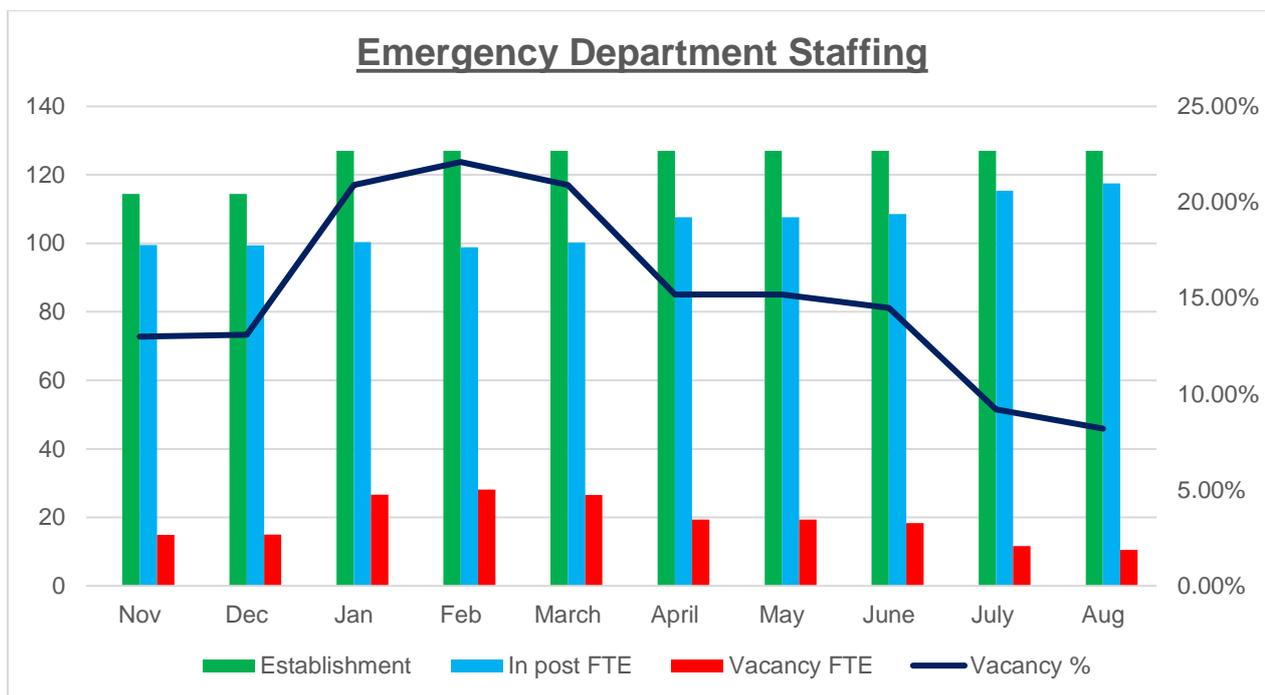
The senior sister group was asked to talent spot individuals (especially in the experienced IEN group), so they could be fast-tracked into areas to be staffed by more senior nurses. These included resuscitations, ambulance, walk-in triage and co-ordination of majors. This was a sometimes challenging change, as staff were being recognised for competency rather than length of time in the department.

What were the results?

Within three months Princess Royal ED had recruited 18 additional Band 5 nurses of varying experience, massively reducing the vacancy rate (see the Figure below).

Staffing was improved, reducing dependence on agency staff to almost zero. This ensured the department was consistently staffed by regular ED staff and operated within budget.

Figure: Emergency department staffing and vacancies



While the trainee nurse associate role could be supported, the trust decided that CDU would not do so because of the department’s location and the supervision requirements of nursing associates. This role could, however, be a solution in paediatric ED, especially considering the recruitment challenges facing this specialty.

What were the learning points?

- As ED is difficult to recruit to, consider creative approaches over more standard ones.
- Review establishments to consider different roles within ED.

Next steps and sustainability

Now staff are in post, the trust needs a robust retention strategy to prevent acute shortages in future. Developing staff at all levels is paramount, and the trust has supported staff through a practice education team. It is taking part in the Capital Nurse programme, which provides regular access to training and development of Band 5 ED nurses.

Talent spotting and managing new staff, especially those whose experience has been gained overseas, are vital for staff to feel valued and their experience to be recognised.

Want to know more?

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

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