

## Reducing healthcare support worker vacancies – case studies

### New to Care

#### University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

#### What was the problem?

- Being situated in the south west of England, where we increasingly have issues with recruitment due to the geographical area.
- There are three large district general hospitals (DGHs) across the sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs), and several smaller specialist hospitals and units with a variety of specialties. We have recognised that this contributes to recruitment and retention issues.
- Having an ageing nursing workforce and a shortage of qualified nurses who wish to come to this part of the UK, and this meant we had to be smart with how we manage the shortfall. The obvious choice was to ‘grow our own’ from the myriad of experienced staff within the organisation; this was a major factor in the choice to provide apprenticeships.
- National drivers, the changing needs of the health service and the reduction of qualified nurses required the trust to review and reconfigure their workforce.
- The Shape of Caring report (2015) highlights the need to widen participation and enable healthcare support workers to develop their career progression.

#### What was the solution?

The aim was to develop a workforce strategy providing a clear career pathway to enable progression. The trust utilised apprenticeship pathways, a push to value the healthcare support worker role, developed a flexible educational model to enable staff to begin ‘new to care’, and offered opportunities to existing staff to continue their educational journey to nurse registration.

The multi-stranded educational programmes have been developed and implemented in collaboration with an internal education team and external higher education institutions – e.g. universities, colleges, local providers – and is delivered internally by the apprenticeship team.



The apprenticeship level 2 programme is a 12-18-month course with an endpoint assessment running six cohorts per year.

The level 3 programme is a diploma-level course with staff taking on extended roles and becoming responsible for supporting other learners in their clinical area.

The level 5 assistant practitioner programme is a two-year foundation degree and involves specialist practitioners in a clinical role supporting the registered nursing workforce in providing high-quality, person-centred care. The cohort will stay in a specific clinical area.

The level 5 nursing associate programme is a two-year foundation degree with placements in medicine, surgery and a specialty to support the registered nursing workforce in providing high-quality person-centred care.

The level 6 nurse degree apprenticeship is a two-year degree course that supports the ongoing development of the Band 4 workforce to complete their nurse degree. On completion staff are guaranteed a Band 5 registered nurse post within the organisation.

All programmes are advertised externally and communicated across the trust through various mediums and discussed at personal appraisals to encourage staff to take up the opportunity if desired.

## What were the challenges?

- Initially we had to overcome the scepticism of these roles as they were seen as a threat to traditional nurse training. However, with discussions and support, the roles are now embedded within the organisation and seen as an addition to the more traditional routes.
- English and maths qualifications have proved difficult. Additional support has had to be put in place to ensure staff are able to reach their full potential by completing these to a good standard before starting any courses. Again, this is difficult because many staff have not gained these qualifications in the past and do not see the relevance of it in relation to their roles. Through discussion and support they have

overcome these barriers and successfully completed the qualifications, allowing them to progress.

- With increasing learner numbers in a clinical environment, it was challenging to ensure there was correct infrastructure to support them. Mentors and assessors is an issue for all learners, but encouragement of the non-registered workforce to support assessment of learners has seen an increase of available good assessors in the clinical areas.

## What were the results?

- The trust's retention rate has improved from 49% to 93% with the introduction of the new level 2 programme.
- 45 staff have completed the new style level 2 programme, with 81 staff currently on the programme.
- 40 staff have completed level 3, with 71 staff on the programme; there has been an increase of courses from two per year to three, and a plan to increase to four per year due to demand.
- 41 assistant practitioners have completed the level 5 foundation degree, with 24 currently on the programme.
- 10 posts are currently being created in a critical care setting for assistant practitioners.
- 16 nursing associates have completed level 5, and registered with the NMC in January 2019.
- 13 staff are currently on the nurse degree programme.
- Quality of programme was assessed as 'good' across the three domains following an Ofsted monitoring visit.
- Recruitment is ongoing throughout the year and we are working closely with local schools to ensure we are giving the correct information and routes available to be able to progress and gain qualifications.

## What were the learning points?

- The programmes work well due to being designed in collaboration with ward managers, matron, specialist leads and educational providers.
- Front loading of skills is a real asset to the clinical areas and learners feel valued, as they are part of the team immediately and feel they can contribute from day one.

- Ofsted visit highlighted areas of good practice and areas for improvement, although this was a monitoring visit, we obtained a 'Good' level across all the 3 domains which is the highest award you can get.
- A good support network of mentors and 'buddies' within the clinical areas and a dedicated team to support learners is essential. This allows a close build-up of relationships and a solid support network for all levels of learners. Manager support is also crucial in the success of these programmes as the releasing of staff can be difficult at times. Offering the correct level of support is a key element in our retention.
- Trust-wide support and commitment at all levels is needed to maintain the programme and support the learners. Without this level of commitment from all staff across the organisation, our retention rate would not be such a success.
- We truly believe that in order to be sustainable, we need to be innovative, inventive and willing to push boundaries without affecting patient care.

## Next steps and sustainability

The trust wishes to continue providing quality programmes at all levels, whether this is through external providers or internal trainers. We believe this philosophy of 'growing our own' has tapped into staff that are excellent in their roles as healthcare support worker but may not have had the opportunity to attend university. By supporting and nurturing this potential we gain an incredibly strong workforce that is self-motivating and continues to progress.

## Want to know more?

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