Creating an engaging staff retention model

Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

What was the problem?

Turnover was increasing, particularly two-year voluntary turnover. As part of NHS Improvement’s retention programme, the trust analysed its data in depth and talked extensively to staff in targeted focus groups.

The focus groups found that nurses stay when they can provide care for their patients, relate to the trust’s values, be recognised and supported in their roles, balance their work and life and continue to learn and remain healthy.

What was the solution?

The trust formed a workforce project group drawing on corporate nursing, human resources, practice development, recruitment and the electronic staff record to create the ‘Stay @ Southend retention model’ (see Figure 1).

Retention strategies implemented as part of this model include:

- Scripting employees’ first 90 days – first impressions predict how long employees stay, so early activities were scripted to present the trust in ways that are both positive and truthful. Stay interviews and stay plans (see Annex – Item A) were developed for individual wards/departments.

- Developing managers to build trust with their teams – managers were asked to improve engagement scores but previously were not supported to do this. The trust created an engagement compendium for managers (see Annex – Item B) with examples of actions and initiatives to improve each key engagement question.
• **Narrowing the front door to close the back door** – new staff must align with trust values. They also need to indicate clearly they intend to stay. Managers were trained to recognise these ‘stayers’ at interview.

• **Challenging policies to ensure they drive retention** – the flexible working policy was reworked and retire-and-return guidelines for managers produced to help manage the ageing workforce.

• Each ward/department was given a detailed **nursing retention dashboard** (see Annex – Item C) and an achievable target measured over six months. The trust introduced **awards for retention improvement** during this period.

**Figure 1: Southend University Hospital’s employee retention model**
What were the challenges?

- Data accuracy was essential and the key starting point. It was important to see when potential recruits left and how long they stay – one week, one month, four months? At what stage are the peaks within the first two years? What are the triggers? Analysis and validation were time-consuming due to inconsistencies in data.

- To gain managers’ commitment to the programme, it was essential to explain the numbers, the costs of not retaining staff and how much time is freed by not having to recruit.

- Selling the hard and soft benefits of stay interviews was important to attract managers to the retention skills workshops.

- Setting targets and rewarding their achievement were seen as yet another measurement for managers, to which it was difficult to get their commitment.

What were the results?

- Indicative turnover rates are at their lowest since July 2017 (see Figure 2) because of the ‘Stay @ Southend’ retention programme for nursing managers.

- Two-year turnover continues to fall.

- Key retention metrics are now reported monthly via the nursing retention dashboard at board level but also at manager level, enabling better monitoring and evaluation.

- Better understanding of the workforce’s aspirations and concerns.

- Positive feedback from managers about the support provided.
Figure 2: Voluntary turnover (2017/18)

- All jobs are now automatically advertised as “part-time and flexible hours considered”.

- Improved engagement with new staff (recognising ‘stayers’) and the ability to deal with issues as they occur, through stay interviews.

- Retention now features in communications, is written about in the e-chief blog and talked about at staff-side/union meetings, staff forums and core brief meetings. It has become a transparent topic.

- Ability to build a stay plan for each ward/department, allowing managers to see retention trends and themes in each area.

- The trust is now seen as an employer that fully supports flexible working and invests in staff development, whatever the individual’s circumstances or age.

What were the learning points?
• Trusts can implement all the staff engagement and benefit programmes they want, but if the relationship between a nurse and their manager is flawed they can only ever expect limited success in driving retention. Managers need practical retention skills and tools, and as with other key performance indicators, they need to be held accountable for their team’s turnover.

• Managers build unique relationships that drive retention and deeply affect employees’ stay/leave decisions. Some employees stay for their manager, some leave because of them. Emphasis needed to be shifted from filling vacancies to retaining staff.

• Pounds speak louder than words and percentages. Managers now recognise the impact of not managing retention and are aware the costs, the time and effort that recruitment involves. They understand how making small changes and working towards retention targets allows them to recruit less and build a team for longevity.

• The board has the greatest impact on achieving retention goals. It is now assured of the commitment and effort to improve retention and is aware of turnover hotspots, leaver reasons and action plans. Both the board and the recruitment and retention committee monitor these monthly.

Next steps and sustainability

The trust plans to extend the Stay @ Southend retention programme to its two sister trusts (Mid Essex Hospital and Basildon Hospital) in autumn 2018. It is happy to share:

• its guide to stay interviews and stay plans for managers

• stay interview and stay plan templates

• the retention skills training module agenda and lesson plan

• engagement compendium for managers.
Want to know more?

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

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Annex

Item A – Stay interviews and stay plans

Stay interviews and stay plans for individual wards/departments

‘Stay interviews’ are the opposite of exit interviews – instead of waiting until a member of staff is leaving to ask the question, “What could we have done to keep you?” we now ask these questions frequently during the employee’s employment.

By asking ‘stay interview’ questions now, our managers have ability to respond to potential issues, thereby preventing or delaying the employee from leaving.

We also avoid the dead-end road of basing retention solutions on exit survey results. Instead we have built a proactive solution we can control. Stay interviews help build trust between our employees and managers.

What does a stay interview look like?

These brief meetings are narrow in scope, discussing only those issues within the manager’s control and influence. The purpose is to help managers communicate to staff they are important, and to create individualised strategies to keep staff (‘pull factors’) as well as strategies to stop or offset reasons why staff would leave (‘push factors’).

- What about this job makes you jump out of bed in the morning?
- What would you like to change about your job? Your team?
- What might entice you away?
- Are we fully using your talents?
- What kind of recognition would be good for you?
- What one thing about working here would cause you to leave if it changed?
- As your manager, what can I do to help you be happier and more successful at work?
Stay plans

Managers are supported to create quick ‘stay plans’ for their new employees. Managers use a simple traffic light method to identify stages of turnover risk: eg green – likely to stay more than 12 months; amber – likely to stay six to 12 months; red – likely to leave within six months. Results are logged on a stay action plan and managers are supported to develop strategies to move employees through these stages.

Item B – Staff engagement compendium

Example page from the staff engagement compendium

KF7: Staff ability to contribute towards improvements at work

1. I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team / department
2. There are frequent opportunities for me to show initiative in my role
3. I am able to make improvements happen in my area of work

Invite ideas by encouraging team members to share their light-bulb moments. Always remind them that they are a critical part of the solutions and improve ways of working at the Trust. There contribution really can make a difference.

Suggestion boxes are old hat but try using a different method e.g. print off some light bulb shapes and place them on the staff notice board or in the staff room. Staff can write an idea on the bulb. As the idea is progressed by the team, the bulb can be coloured in until fully coloured on completion.

Two way meetings – change up your team meetings, rotate the ‘chair’, allowing the lead adequate time to prepare ahead of the meeting. Encourage updates on projects or tasks that team members or groups are working on. Share wider issues and Trust news and ask for input on these, this can generate new ideas that could be taken forward by your Directorate or by the Trust.

Promote employee voice (one of the four key enablers of engagement) by encouraging participation in staff networks, such as our Staff Forum or one of our diversity groups. This provides your team with opportunities to interact with other departments and teams across the Trust. As a team help prepare any suggestions for improvement to be taken to these networks and ensure the nominated team member(s) report back to everyone feedback and progress.

Saying thank you gratitude is a gift that is never too small to give. Think about ways you can say thank you for showing initiative or adding value sincerely. It could be a Thank You Board or tree on the wall. It could be the final section of a team meeting which gives everyone the opportunity to say thank you for work done well to each other.

Invite team members to management meetings (ask if its ok first). This will help employees understand what happens outside of their own team and will help raise the profile of the team. It can also encourage inter-team collaboration.
Item C – Nursing retention dashboard

Example page from the nursing retention dashboard

May 2018: how is our turnover rate? Trust Level

This month
Voluntary turnover reduced slightly by 0.33% to 12.33%, the lowest figure since February 2017. This figure includes those retiring (voluntary retirement and ill-health retirement), which when subtracted reduces the voluntary turnover to 10.33% (KP is 5.5%). High turnover directorates include ES, Medicine, MSK, Surgery and Women's & Children.

Number of Voluntary Leavers by Staff Group & Month
1st June 2017 - 31st May 2018

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<th>Staff Group &amp; Month</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sep</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
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<th>Feb</th>
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Reasons for leaving
Reasons for staff leaving this month are:
- Work/life balance (13)
- Child dependents (2)
- Lack of opportunities (2)
- Relocation (6)
- Promotion (2)
- Health (2)
- Better reward (2)

BAME Leavers
The percentage of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff at the Trust is 24.19% (Jan 2018).
The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff who left us this month is 24% (9 out of 38). 29 White/British, 4 Asian, 3 African. 2 not stated. Of these 2 retired, 6 left for work/life balance, and 1 for relocation.

Turnover Controls in Place
Turnover controls in place include: monthly Retention Committee reviews turnover hotspots, leaver reasons and action planning to ensure there are controls in place to improve the attrition rate. As part of the NHSI Retention Programme we have commenced a wide programme of turnover reduction activities at Trust level and in specific hotspot areas. The relationship between employee and manager is key to the reduction in attrition, particularly within the first 12 months of the employee's career with us. Retention Skills Training for managers which includes guidance on recruiting "stayers", improving engagement with new employees, enhancing flexible working and managing an ageing workforce being rolled out across directorates. Our health, wellbeing, recognition and engagement programme action plans are also in place with initiatives due for implementation during Q3 and Q4 2018.

Leavers Destination
Which Trusts did they go to?
- 1 Essex Partnership University
- 1 BUHT
- 1 South Essex Partnership
- 24 undefined

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