Introducing registered ward-based therapists to improve care quality and lessen the impact of registered nurse vacancies

What was the problem?
Despite continual attempts to recruit locally, nationally and internationally, maintaining safe staffing levels was difficult given increasing nurse vacancies across the country. The trust wanted to rely less on bank and agency staff while providing timely therapy assessments and rehabilitation.

What was the solution?
Introducing ward-based therapists, particularly registered occupational therapists and physiotherapists, as an integral part of the nursing team. Five whole-time equivalent posts in four wards encompass aspects of nursing and therapy. The therapists support nurses in daily living activities such as washing, dressing and toileting, using their skills to assess the patient when doing so. They are included on e-rostering so the ward manager manages holidays and sickness absence.

What were the results?
- The wards maintained quality, with no dips in friends and family test or patient experience data
- Introducing ward-based therapists helped reduce falls.
- Early assessment of patients requiring therapy interventions: for example, patient washing and dressing assessments are completed while getting the patient up and dressed in the morning.

What were the learning points?
- Ensure baseline data are obtained before introducing the role to measure impact on care quality.
- Develop clear agreed competencies by combining band 5 nursing and band 5 therapy competencies.
- Feedback from both registered therapy disciplines suggested the role is better suited to occupational therapists as it focuses on activities of daily living, and to rehabilitation rather than acute clinical areas.
- As the role evolved in the rehabilitation ward it provided more time to coach, mentor and support staff.
Find out more

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