

Nursing development programme

South London Mental Health and Community Partnership

What was the aim?

South London Partnership's (SLP) three trusts – Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust – faced a challenge recruiting and retaining mental health nurses. SLP needed the right skill-mix, flexibility and experience, particularly to grow its community services. In-depth research, including 35 consultation events, identified how they could improve nurses' working lives, including:

- more face-to-face nursing time with patients
- better training opportunities
- clear career development paths
- wider experiences, including within new community services.

What was the solution?

SLP launched a nursing development programme, led and championed by the three trusts' directors of nursing. Working collaboratively and at scale helped raise ambitions to be more flexible and offer more and new opportunities for staff.

A wide range of nurses supports and delivers the programme, including a seconded Band 7 development nurse in each trust. Projects have included:

- Band 4 nursing associate/assistant practitioner programme
- Band 2 to 6 career ladder including consistent competencies, job descriptions, assessment, and learning and development pathways

- funded postgraduate courses
- an ‘employee passport’ to ease movement between the trusts, which removed duplicated pre-employment checks and mandatory and statutory training, while sharing development, training and appraisal records (with employee consent)
- joint recruitment campaigns
- Darzi fellow (nurse) appointed for a year.

What were the challenges?

SLP fully involved HR at a senior level as the initiative had major policy implications. Working across three trusts meant taking account of multiple policies, practices, personalities (including changes to senior leadership teams) and cultures – and blending things together. SLP had to be pragmatic and positive, articulating the benefits to individuals and patients.

What were the results?

- 70 Band 2/3 staff moved onto the Band 4 development programme.
- Early signs of improved retention rate with full-year analysis planned.
- 18 nurses taking MSc, BSc or diplomas.
- Improved engagement, knowledge and best practice-sharing across the areas.
- Further innovation-based funding secured from Health Education England.

One Band 4 nursing associate programme participant commented: “I feel confident and empowered to take on extra responsibility. It has been a very positive experience and definitely enhanced my feeling of professionalism. The NHS is evolving, and we can’t stand still. We need to constantly improve our skills and knowledge”

What were the learning points?

Building trust is vital at all levels. Development nurses needed time to settle into a new role: engaging and embedding often complex change across large organisations is a challenge for all change professionals. SLP had to empower them to focus on delivery. Directors of nursing built a rapport by recognising their different leadership styles and that the new collaborative relationship involved supporting each other in their ‘day jobs’. Introducing major changes inside a year – for example, common job descriptions for more than 4,000 nurses,

and shared competencies and development paths – helped ensure change was deep-rooted and sustainable.

Next steps

SLP continues to focus on embedding new ways of working. Next steps include broadening opportunities and formal development pathways for nurses at Band 7 and above, into clinical, operational and general leadership roles. SLP plans to develop more community-based interventions, therapies, assessment and planning skills.

Want to know more?

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