Improving staff retention – case studies

Chief nurse junior fellowship

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

What was the problem?

Gloucestershire’s main people and organisational development challenges were in attracting, recruiting and retaining its workforce – particularly its registered nursing workforce. In June 2019, the trust’s vacancy rate for nursing and midwifery was 9.41% (254 posts) and turnover of staff nurses was 17.36%. While this compares favourably to the average turnover in large acute trusts (21.84%), Gloucestershire deemed it too high: lower turnover could reduce the need for large recruitment campaigns in the competitive market for registered nurses.

What was the solution?

The Chief Nurse Junior Fellowship idea was suggested by Chief Nurse Steve Hams, inspired by the model developed at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. But initially, the trust saw it as an attraction and recruitment initiative rather than one designed to retain staff.

By learning from Nottingham’s model, the trust held project team meetings with education and operational colleagues to determine what would work for Gloucestershire.

Target audience: the development fellowship is for the most talented newly qualified recruits – specifically those with a at least a 2:1 degree who have completed the trust’s 12-month preceptorship programme.

The programme offer:

- Leadership development, offering the ILM Level 3 diploma in leadership and management. As with all apprenticeships, this requires protected learning time of, on average, 0.20 (a day per week).
• A diagnostic welcome session in-house to include self-assessment against leadership and quality improvement (QI) competences and the Myers Briggs personality preference profiling.

• Completion of the trust’s in-house QI introduction bronze session and support to complete a silver QI programme and project through the Gloucestershire Safety and Quality Improvement Academy.

• Regular facilitated action learning sets (a minimum of three per programme).

• Leadership coaching with a qualified faculty coach.

• ‘Insight’ opportunities, including access to Steve Hams; shadowing senior meetings and colleagues within the organisation and across the Gloucestershire health, social care, business and charitable sectors; fellowship project meetings to help shape the future programmes; careers and recruitment fairs. Fellows will travel to Nottingham in September to share their experience.

Applications and selection

The trust used external and internal adverts, inviting candidates to pitch their QI idea to a panel, against patient-centred organisational priorities – eg discharge, patient flow, etc.

What were the challenges?

Some ward managers felt uncomfortable that the fellowship was offered only to new recruits, as they knew existing nurses who would benefit from it. The trust therefore decided to recruit for the programme both internally and externally.

The fellowship had a slow start, and despite some interest from external candidates, none applied. There were six internal applicants, leading to four offers (one subsequently withdrew). The first cohort therefore consisted of three fellows, who have proved hard-working pioneers.

While all programme costs are borne in-house and by the apprenticeship levy, wards have to absorb the backfill. This posed a challenge for some.

The programme required significant hard work, and initially the fellows did not all receive their colleagues’ support.
What were the results?

All fellows have completed their QI projects or are about to do so, passed the written assessments for the apprenticeship and are awaiting the final assessment later in the year. All are considering their next job at the trust, which they say they would not have had the courage, confidence or skills to do without this opportunity.

The second cohort was recruited in April 2019 and started the programme in June. The opportunity was open to midwives, therapists, paediatric nurses and radiographers – 13 were recruited. While none came to the trust directly through the job advert, two reported they actively sought jobs with the trust before the second cohort, with the aim of applying to become a fellow – so the initiative has had an impact on both recruitment and retention.

What were the learning points?

The programme was initially time-consuming for staff running it and required considerable encouragement of ward managers who found the backfill issue difficult. The fellows required more support than originally identified, but this was accommodated because of their clear enthusiasm. More learning is expected from the second cohort, which is larger and with mixed professions.

Next steps and sustainability

The trust plans to launch a third cohort as the first comes to an end. It plans to continue for the next few years, aligning the programme to current trends in nursing, QI, nursing careers and leadership. The programme will be used as part of the organisation’s commitment to the 2020 Nightingale Challenge.

Want to know more?

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