

## Improving staff retention – case studies

# Listening and responding to staff: a paediatric ward's retention journey

## Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

The trust is a large organisation occupying three sites: Frimley Park, Heatherwood and Wexham Park. It also provides community services for patients in their own homes and from community-based sites. Children's services are based on the two acute sites at Frimley Park and Wexham Park.

### What was the problem?

Wexham Park's children's ward had a vacancy rate of nearly 50% in 2013. As a result, the senior sister and the practice development nurse (PDN) worked almost entirely clinically to support the junior team, so had no time for other responsibilities, including developing and supporting staff. Most of the ward team were junior staff nurses who had not completed certain competencies, including some related to intravenous medication and the high dependency unit (HDU).

On Frimley Park's children's ward, the highest vacancy rate was 30% in 2015. Leaders at this site struggled to retain any of the student workforce after qualifying, due to issues relating to morale, high agency usage, and a lack of development and training opportunities.

### What was the solution?

Initiatives included:

- **Actively listening** to ward staff concerns and suggestions. A staff-room suggestions box was followed up with well-attended staff forums facilitated by a Band 5 and Band 7 nurse. Communication and trust between junior and senior staff improved.
- **Introducing the 'café culture'** where staff were asked what they wanted, how they felt and how the senior team could support them. This was a reminder that education and development were not just for newly qualified staff or those on action plans.

- **Securing transformation funding** for a fixed-term full-time Band 6 PDN to support the Band 7 PDN.
- **Ensuring the paediatric preceptorship programme** met the teams' requirements by introducing cross-site acute care skills study days that staff attended in work time.
- Using simulation, a maths test and interview for **recruitment**.
- Regularly reviewing **flexible working** patterns to ensure they were fair for all staff.
- Developing an 18-month '**Band 6 in training**' programme so that senior Band 5 nurses had a clear development pathway, with an experienced Band 6 as their mentor. This helped them move from Band 5 to Band 6 and enabled them to be paid more without the full responsibility while training.
- A **paediatric in-house module** accredited by the University of West London, for those who have consolidated preceptorship and are looking for their next academic step.
- **Seconding support staff and nursery nurses** to children's nurse training: three have successfully completed this. More recently, existing staff took the trainee associate practitioner (AP) and nursing associate (NA) trainee courses. One recently qualified associate practitioner is about to start children's training.
- **Writing a cross-site Band 2 to 4 development pathway**, focusing on using newly acquired knowledge and clinical skills from courses and competencies.
- **Developing experienced internationally educated nurses** to undertake a paediatric pathway course, which has enabled them to progress as nurse in charge and potentially Band 6. This has helped develop their careers in paediatrics instead of potentially losing them to adult areas.
- **Facilitating regular clinical supervision** by the senior team for all bands of nurses.
- **Safeguarding supervision** held monthly with specific sessions when required both during and after challenging cases.
- **Uplifting temporary staffing (bank) pay** to match substantive pay scales.
- A **bridging the gap programme** to prepare students in their final year/placement for registration and maintain excellent feedback from the students and universities.

- **Facilitating monthly ward-based multidisciplinary team simulation**, which developed skills and confidence.

## What were the challenges?

Reassuring staff, managing expectations and remaining positive could be draining but was mitigated by a close working relationship between the senior sister and the practice development team. This allowed for open, honest and frank discussions.

Having only one Band 7 senior sister for the ward, HDU, day surgery unit, medical day unit and paediatric assessment unit, with a Band 6 deputy to support. The Band 7 post was agreed by the director of nursing and associate director by uplifting some Band 5 vacancy funds.

Frimley Park's acquisition of Wexham Park and the formation of Frimley Health caused some staff to be concerned about future roles and expectations.

Band 6 staff felt drained, as they were in charge during every shift. Enabling senior Band 5 staff to complete their nurse-in-charge competencies relieved the pressure on Band 6 staff.

The ward and paediatric assessment unit (PAU) underwent major renovation throughout this process.

## What were the results?

In 2019 Wexham Park's vacancy rate was reduced to around 6%, and Frimley Park's to around 4%. In addition:

- Testimonials from [staff<sup>1</sup>](#) and a [parent<sup>2</sup>](#) describe the difference the initiative has made.
- Appraisal rates improved from 46% to 98%.
- Staff survey results show paediatrics has been the highest scoring department in Frimley Health in the last two years, supporting evaluations and feedback.
- The table below shows the effect on recruitment and retention.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1dmEaVWm2M&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbnEKkA9RL4&feature=youtu.be>

Ward 24, WPH	Number of staff nurses recruited	Preceptee	Experienced staff nurse	Trainee AP/NA	Timeline to achieve single checking oral meds	Timeline to begin peripheral IVs	Time-line to begin CVC	Timeline to begin HDU
2012-14	14	8 50% retained	6 30% retained		By 3 months	By 1 year	By 18 months	By 18 months
2015-17	24	16 75% retained	8 87.5% retained		By 6 weeks (students based at Wexham Park)	By 3 months	By 6 months or after IVs	By 6 months to 1 year
2017-date	15	14 100% retained	1 100% retained	4				

During 2015-17:

- one preceptee left nursing
- one staff nurse left for a paediatric intensive care unit in London
- two experienced staff nurses returned to Ward 24 from another trust
- two nurses from overseas on preceptorship package returned to Italy as they were on a vacancy waiting list (one awaiting Nursing and Midwifery Council PIN number)
- instead of two registered nurses checking medications, nurses became competent in single checking of oral medications – within six weeks, for student nurses who had had placements on the ward.

## What were the learning points?

- Senior staff need to be visible in the clinical environment and give staff time to focus and reflect.
- When developing a retention strategy, time to process ideas is important for avoiding kneejerk reactions or bad decisions.
- Staff said they felt they were listened to, their opinions were important and suggestions acted on. Staff nurses said they knew they would be supported through their preceptorship as they had seen this happening as students. When an experienced staff nurse said she was finding work-life balance a challenge, the senior team created specific Band 6 roles for PAU and day surgery unit.

## Next steps and sustainability

- The trust has a strong team that is encouraged to develop as the trust embraces new ways of working.
- The trust feels self-sufficient and able to make innovations in clinical care, leadership and education.
- Preceptorship is embedded and ever evolving, currently focusing on learning from incidents.
- Paediatrics intends to share experiences with other areas in the trust facing staffing issues.
- The trust will showcase its achievements and innovations on Facebook and Twitter, which may attract local staff and national forum groups.

## Want to know more?

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