Volunteering pack

Staff support for volunteers
This chapter considers the potential problems that may arise when integrating staff and volunteers, and provides practical advice on how to avoid them. It also highlights a charter developed in partnership by Volunteering England and the Trades Union Congress, which sets out the key principles on which volunteering is organised and how good relations between paid staff and volunteers are built.

It is important for the success of a volunteer programme that staff feel comfortable working alongside volunteers and feel able to support them in their role. It is equally important that volunteers feel welcome, valued and enjoy the role they play in delivering services in the NHS.

Employers need to be aware that not all staff welcome volunteers into their workplace, and that there are a number of reasons why some employees may feel threatened by their presence. Staff may feel the need to be assured that:

- volunteer roles are not those that should be undertaken by paid staff
- short-time working, job cuts or redundancy are not being implemented
- the role of the volunteer and how it may relate to their role will be discussed with them and their team and staff representatives
- the way in which volunteer roles are managed and supported will be discussed and any concerns worked through.

Staff may also express concerns about:

- volunteers being a burden rather than a help
- their own ability to line manage or control volunteers
- the reliability of volunteers or their ability to understand working in the healthcare setting.

Some of these concerns understandably come to prominence in times of economic downturn and recession, where high unemployment leads to unfounded concerns that volunteers may be substituted for paid staff.
To ensure that these concerns do not impact on the relationship between staff and volunteers in NHS trusts, NHS Employers has worked closely with the voluntary sector and the trade unions to develop the following principles:

- Ensure that your volunteer policy clearly expresses why volunteers are involved in delivering services in the organisation – outline the benefits for the organisation, employees and patients.

- Involve staff in the development of volunteering roles and programmes and keep staff representatives updated.

- Ensure that the volunteer role is not one that would be done by paid staff – voluntary activity should complement the work of paid staff, not be a substitute for it.

- Involve staff in evaluating the success of the volunteering programme and how they feel about working alongside volunteers.

- Develop your volunteer policy with staff representatives, volunteer groups and HR – make sure that they are also involved in updating the policy regularly.

- Include staff representatives, volunteer groups and HR in the development of problem-solving procedures – make sure that they are also involved in updating the policy regularly.

- Policies and procedures developed for volunteers should be different from staff – staff undertaking voluntary roles should adhere to the volunteer policies when not working as an employee.

- Make working with volunteers part of job descriptions and personal development plans, which are then evaluated at appraisals.

- Support staff to participate in volunteering activities – during and out of work time.

- Staff participating in internal volunteering schemes should always undertake roles unrelated to their paid work and in another department or part of the organisation.

- Include information about volunteers and volunteering in staff inductions.

- Give recognition to staff who work well with, and support, volunteers.

- Involve staff and staff side in the selection and induction of volunteers.

- Arrange line management training for staff who will manage volunteers. This is a development opportunity for them and can be added to their personal development plans.
Working with volunteers should be a rewarding experience for staff and volunteers alike – volunteers can undertake tasks that paid staff are too busy to do. Some of these are necessary tasks which may involve time spent helping to feed patients who have difficulty feeding themselves, and some are just good for improving patient morale such as reading aloud or taking time for a bit of conversation.

If a problem arises between staff and a volunteer it should be dealt with quickly. Trusts should have in place a problem-solving procedure for volunteers that is different from staff grievance policies. Further information on problem solving is available in our Volunteer management chapter.

A Charter for Strengthening Relations between Paid Staff and Volunteers¹

Published in September 2009, and developed in partnership by Volunteering England and the Trades Union Congress, the charter sets out the key principles on which volunteering is organised and how good relations between paid staff and volunteers are built.

It provides a model for use by individual unions, volunteer-involving organisations in the public, third and private sectors and other bodies in discussions around the use of volunteers.

Copies of the charter are available to download from the Volunteering England website: www.volunteering.org.uk
