JANUARY 2018

CASE STUDY

SOUTH WESTERN AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS FOUNDATION TRUST
STAYING WELL SERVICE IMPROVES STAFF HEALTH

Organisational profile
South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT) has three operational divisions.
- North Division – Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Bath and North-East Somerset.
- West Division – Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
- East Division – Dorset and Somerset.

The trust operates 96 ambulance stations, six air bases with clinical teams for air ambulances, and two emergency clinical hubs. Its operations include emergency ambulance 999 services, urgent care services, GP out-of-hours medical care, NHS 111 call handling and triage services for Cornwall, Dorset and the Isles of Scilly.

SWASFT employs more than 4,000 clinical and operational staff.
Summary

In the 2014 NHS Staff Survey the overall national engagement score was 3.37; for ambulance trusts the average score was lower at 3.28.

At SWASFT the wellbeing of staff is a key priority. On top of this, the trust views staff engagement as being fundamental to delivering high-quality clinical services and transformational change.

In 2014-15 the trust launched an organisation-wide survey to collect employee views. A volunteer from each area of the trust attended one of four meetings, each chaired by the chief executive, Ken Wenman. The forums were an opportunity to explore the health and wellbeing of staff, and to understand the challenges they faced. Feedback from the meetings was provided to the chief executive and the board. The findings demonstrated that health and wellbeing issues differed, dependent on geographical location.

As part of the consultation, the board analysed the wellbeing policies of other ambulance trusts across England. Using the information from the research and staff engagement activity, they created the staying well service (SWS).

A range of feedback mechanisms are in place to encourage and enable the provision of information for employees. These include the chief executive’s weekly bulletin, focus groups and local consultation committees.

What the trust is doing

Staying well service

The trust launched its staying well service (SWS) in December 2015, as a dedicated, confidential support service for the workforce. It started with one full-time mental health practitioner (MHP), employed to provide support and host clinics across the SWAST area to ensure all employees had access to the service. This was the first time an MHP was solely devoted to the needs of staff in the ambulance service.

The SWS enables rapid access to support, the MHP offering triage calls and providing direct face-to-face contact or signposting to appropriate services. Staff contact the service, if for example, they are seeking support for personal stress, problems at home or drug and alcohol issues. The trust continues to work with providers of specialist counselling and post-traumatic stress disorder support, which are accessed through the SWS. A second full-time MHP was employed to meet demand, both working from the trust headquarters.

Responding to musculoskeletal injuries sustained by staff, SWASFT introduced fast track physiotherapy. Staff are provided with a physiotherapist within a 15-minute drive of their home or work address.

1700 members of staff accessed the service within the first 18 months, and the board deemed SWS as a success

HR Roadshows

Staff engagement activity had traditionally been carried out at ambulance stations across the trust. The management team would visit the stations and have face-to-face time with staff, which worked particularly well during periods of down-time.

However, over a five-year period employee down-time decreased dramatically and this was reflected in the staff engagement 2014 survey results. With increased workload, less down-time and more mobility of staff, the station visits were considered to be no longer effective. Staff felt they did not have sufficient time to read emails and process information from white boards and the intranet. A new communication channel was required.

As a result, the HR and OD team introduced new roadshows at emergency departments across the region. The roadshows are held in hospital car parks using the trust’s PR ambulance - a vehicle adapted by the communications team for events. The roadshows were designed to encourage good relations and were considered to be a much more accessible way for ambulance staff to attend.
Using a text alert system, notifications are sent to staff of the roadshow dates. Local operational managers attend and encourage staff to visit the roadshow, giving them a 15-minute break to enjoy a cup of tea and receive important information from HR and trust management teams.

The roadshows provide an invaluable opportunity for HR to foster good relations with staff, giving them an opportunity to ask and answer key questions. The roadshows will continue to be used to help deliver important information and build on engaging with staff.

**Outcomes and next steps**

Positive changes were realised when the key findings of the NHS Staff Survey from 2015 to 2016 were published. SWASFT achieved the highest score of any ambulance service in 2016 rising from 3.28 to 3.56.

The number of working days lost due to musculoskeletal absence reduced. From 1 December 2014 to 30 November 2015 the total was 20,089. The physiotherapy process started on 1 December 2015 and following its introduction, the number of working days lost to musculoskeletal absence up to 30 November 2016 was 16,812, a reduction of 3277 working days.

Based on the estimated average cost of £150 a day, the cost of covering an operational shift, 3277 working days equates to a saving of £491,550. The trust spent £81,927 on physiotherapy in the same period, giving a net saving of £409,623 and a return on investment of 499 per cent.

**Mental, social and emotional health**

Mental, social and emotional health issues are key themes referred to the SWS service. Analysis conducted on a random selection of 20 staff on long-term sick leave in 2016, found reasons for leave included stress, anxiety and depression.

The findings from this analysis demonstrated that staff who accessed support were absent from work for an average of 15 working days less than staff who hadn’t accessed the service. Using the same financial calculation for physiotherapy (£150 a day) a further saving of £9000 for each member of staff who accessed the service.

**Top tips**

- Involve staff as early as possible in new services
- Empower staff to design appropriate services within set parameters
- If staff help build a new service, they will use it
- The best advert for a new service is empowering staff to spread the word
- Simple things like a free cup of tea will help make staff more receptive

**Contact**

For more information on how to become involved in our work:

www.nhsemployers.org
enquiries@nhsemployers.org

@nhsemployers
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