BARKING, HAVERING AND REDBRIDGE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL NHS TRUST
STRENGTHENING YOUR NURSING SUPPLY

The organisation

Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospital NHS Trust (BHRUT) employs over 7,000 staff and volunteers who care for a diverse population of 750,000 people. It is made up of two acute hospitals - King George Hospital and Queen’s Hospital - and runs clinics across outer north-east London, as well as providing some services from Barking Hospital.

The challenge

BHRUT is in short supply of nurses. It currently employs around 1000 band 5 nursing posts, and attrition is around one in five. Sitting on the periphery of London and Essex, the location of the trust makes nursing supply challenging. Other factors such as the high cost of living and travel time to the trust impacts on how it attracts and retains nurses.

The trust found that there were simply not the numbers of qualified band 5 nurses to fill the vacancies. Despite being in special measures for the trust’s finances, the organisation knew it needed to approach vacancies differently.

Steps to success

BHRUT identified the need to focus on strengthening its nursing supply. Traditionally the trust recruited band 5 nurses through pre-registration nursing degrees, studied at university, augmented by recruiting internationally. However, today there are now a number of routes into nursing roles including apprenticeships. The trust has seen this as an opportunity to look at how it attracts and recruits talent, and develops and retains its nursing workforce.

The trust used funds allocated to nursing vacancies to support different routes into nursing, such as training for the nursing associate role and the registered nurse degree apprenticeship. While BHRUT acknowledges that these can be more expensive option, it is financially comparable to agency spend or recruiting internationally, and can reduce nurse vacancies. This information was presented to the board, which approved funding for five nurse degree apprenticeships and 40-50 trainee nursing associate to be introduced within the organisation.
Growing your own nurses

BHRUT developed a nursing career pathway, which shows how new starters can progress from apprentice through to advanced clinical practice or ward manager. The purpose of this was to improve nurse supply routes for the trust, and to support potential and existing employees to see how they could be developed and retained in the organisation.

BHRUT had a number of band 2 health care assistants (HCAs), but there were no band 3 or band 4 roles for the HCAs to progress into. To tackle this, the trust introduced band 4 nursing associate roles to develop a career pathway for the nursing profession. With the required qualifications, new or existing staff can join the career pathway at any entry point. For example, a band 2 HCA may train to become a registered band 4 nursing associate, and then use their experiential learning towards a qualification to become a band 5 nurse.

Providing staff with a clear career pathway has impacted on staff engagement, experience and morale - staff feel valued and invested in. It has also allowed the trust to identify members of staff who would like to develop but hadn’t previously been identified or in the position to. The career pathway has since been replicated across other staff groups in the organisation.

Nursing associates

The nursing associate role sits between health care assistant and registered nurse. Trusts were provided with support from Health Education England to implement the pilot role, in which trainee nursing associates deliver hands-on care to patients. At BHRUT they spend two years in a working and learning environment, with one day per week at university and four days in a healthcare setting.

Trainee nursing associates learn new skills across a range of settings, as well as rotating within departments at BHRUT. They’ve also had the opportunity to work at the North East London NHS Foundation Trust, learning more about mental health and community nursing.

Nurse degree apprentices

BHRUT was one of the first trusts in England to appoint level 6 nursing degree apprentices (NDA) and currently has five existing staff going through the apprenticeship, which is delivered in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University.

To recruit to the NDA role the trust asked matrons and clinical staff to support with interviews alongside Anglia Ruskin University. There was a lot of demand from existing staff for the NDA.

The NDA is 42 months long, and combines full-time work-based learning and placement time. In the first year the apprentices will spend one week on induction at
university and then one day a week for the first six to eight weeks at university and four days per week learning in their home department.

The NDAs first placement is in the home department they originally worked in. This has presented some easy wins as staff already know the apprentices, and it has been easier to allocate shifts as apprentices and as healthcare assistants. When NDAs move into their next placement some planning is required to ensure a smooth a transition. So far planning with managers for the new placements has gone well, and the workforce is supportive of the registered nurse degree apprenticeship role.

To help to define which capacity the learners are working in, i.e. as a NDA or a HCA, they wear different coloured uniforms for each role. This helps with shifting mindset of colleagues and the apprentices to the roles they’re in.

Apprentices then undertake two further blocks of 12-week placements. The placements include two days per week on placement as a NDA, and three days per week the placement is provided through work-based learning in which the apprentice works in a HCA capacity.

There is also the requirement to do a full time four-week mental health placement, which is supernumerary. Each division within the trust has financially sponsored one NDA to support backfill when on placement. Placement time increases in the remaining months of the apprenticeship. The trust has populated a block plan for the duration of the apprenticeship which identifies the time spent on placement, in university and learning in the work place. This has helped the trust to start workforce planning for backfill now.

The trust has chosen to salary protect the first cohort of nurse degree apprentices as they are existing members of staff. The trust is looking at pay models for future cohorts to make them as financially sustainable for the trust as possible.

**Barriers and solutions**

**Getting buy in for the NDA role**

The trust has an apprenticeship steering group, which included the trust’s chief operating officer, members of staff from finance and human resources, and a lead from each division. The steering group has helped to make apprenticeships a success as all the key business areas have worked collaboratively.

**Backfill for nurse degree apprenticeships**

Nursing roles are never fully recruited to, therefore there will be money available to fill vacancies. This money is being used to support backfill for the time in which nursing degree apprentices are supernumerary as the trust recognises the importance of attracting and developing nursing degree apprentices to support its current workforce strategy.

**Meeting the public-sector target of 2.3 per cent**
The trust identified that they needed to spend around £150,000 to meet the 2.3 per cent public-sector target. BHRUT split this across the six divisions within the trust, giving the divisions with larger headcounts more of the levy to spend.

Outcomes/successes

- BHRHT has been able to shape its business for the future by reinvesting the apprenticeship levy funds into learning and skills priorities to further develop the workforce. The trust anticipates that this will support with improving staff retention.
- Learning is tailored to the workplace, which allows the trust to deliver this in the way that is most suitable for them and teams.
- The programme gives nurse degree apprentices an opportunity to earn while they learn, which has widened participation and routes into nursing for the trust.

Top tips

- Set up a steering group which includes the key stakeholders required to make apprenticeships a success.
- Consider all the of the routes into nursing available to help with your nursing supply challenges.
- Develop visual career pathways to support development conversations between line managers and employees.
- Work closely with your education provider to build a programme which works for your organisation.

Further information

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