The organisation

York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (YTH) provides a comprehensive range of acute hospital and specialist healthcare services for approximately 800,000 people living in and around York, North Yorkshire, North East Yorkshire and Ryedale - an area covering 3,400 square miles.

YTH manage ten hospital sites, they have 1,127 beds (including day case beds) and has a workforce of over 8,000 staff working across the trust and in the community.

The challenge

The trust initially needed to make savings of £33 million over three years - £12.2 million was required for the financial year 2010/11, which equates to a saving of approximately £30 per employee each week.

The project to reduce sickness absence was initially established in April 2008 as a twelve-month project focusing on proactive and supportive sickness management.

The initial focus of the project was on reducing sickness absence and ensuring early intervention measures for staff who were off sick, were in place. The initiatives implemented have delivered excellent results and this area continues to be a focus for the trust. The trust recognised that managing staff health and wellbeing is much broader than the traditional parameters of sickness absence management. In 2012, the trust developed a staff health, wellbeing and engagement strategy. The strategy took a more holistic approach and recognised that there are many factors that impact on health and wellbeing, such as lifestyle choices, reward, recognition work-life balance, staff engagement and the environment. A three-year action plan was developed, including training and support for managers and progress monitored through the trust’s health and wellbeing steering group.
Steps to success

The continued focus on staff health and wellbeing has enabled the trust to deliver significant improvements. They ensure that they are clearly communicating that the wellbeing of staff is a key priority especially as this contributes to the provision of high-quality patient care. Some of the improvements included:

- engaging the board and improving board support. A range of approaches were used for this, including regular updates on progress with links to efficiency savings, as well as board involvement in initiatives. This included a board tasting session of healthy menu options as part of the healthy eating initiative and a board team participating in the Global Corporate Challenge
- investing £100,000 into new posts in Human Resources (HR) and Occupational Health (OH). Posts include an HR adviser and senior OH adviser to act as champions on sickness absence, identifying and targeting areas with high levels of sickness and to assist line managers in proactively managing sickness absence in line with trust policy. The trust also provided increased capacity in OH, staff counselling, and physiotherapy
- providing new initiatives for staff such as a voluntary staff benefits package, a staff recognition programme, supportive policies and practices, fairness champions and a staff suggestion scheme
- providing high impact, interactive training. This included engagement with managers that focused on supporting and promoting wellbeing. An embedded training course was available to managers and presented through the use of drama and using real life examples of sickness issues. 87 per cent of participants confirmed that they felt more confident following the event to deal with sickness absence issues.
- introducing master classes that focus on helping managers understand how to support staff with particularly complex and sensitive health issues e.g. cancer and mental health
- ensuring key stakeholders worked together to achieve the trust’s health and wellbeing strategy. This included the introduction of a health and wellbeing steering group and a bi-monthly informal health and wellbeing network group. The network group ensured local intelligence was shared and that key stakeholders were working together and not in separate silos
- taking a targeted approach in wellbeing by making it fun and easy for staff. The achieved benefits far outweighed what had been expected and enabled the trust to demonstrate the value of continued investment in staff health and wellbeing
- developing and strengthening staff side relationships which included the creation of a signed partnership agreement.
**Key outcomes**

At the start of year one of the project, the trust’s quarterly sickness rate was 5.13 per cent. Over the first three years that the project was running, the trust achieved a proportionate reduction in sickness absence of 32 per cent. This equates to having approximately 57 more FTE staff at work - nearly enough to cover two wards which has an obvious positive impact on the delivery of patient care.

The [The Boorman Review, November 2009](#) states that the cost of a day’s absence to the NHS is £163. At the start of the project, the trust was losing approximately 52,717 days per year. This has now reduced to around 36,000 days, a reduction of £2.71 million and a saving of approximately £5.58 million over the three years.

YTH’s work has since been recognised as an example of good practice at the 'Leading Workforce Thinking Conference' in 2009, was runner up for a HPMA award in 2010, and has been included as a best practice example in the 'Health at Work – an independent review of sickness absence' report by Dame Carol Black and David Frost CBE published in November 2011. The trust were also 2012 winners of the HPMA for Staff Engagement and Leadership through challenging times, and 'Active Workplace of the Year’ winners 2014 and 2015.

**Top tips**

- Engage your board and get them actively involved in your initiatives.
- Make health and wellbeing fun and easily accessible for staff.
- Train and invest in your line managers.
Further information
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