NORTH TEES AND HARTLEPOOL NHS TRUST
SUPPORTING SKILLED REFUGEES INTO CLINICAL PRACTICE TO HELP WORKFORCE SUPPLY

Background

NHS organisations across the UK continue to face skills shortages and increased vacancy rates, causing increasing workforce supply pressures.

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust (NTHFT) recognised an opportunity to tackle some of these challenges through using the vital skills of the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers joining its community.

What they do

In collaboration with Health Education England (HEE), researcher Dr Amelia Kehoe and local charity - Investing in People and Culture, NTHFT developed a resettlement programme for qualified overseas doctors and healthcare professionals (REPOD). Its aim was to help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into their local community as well as addressing hard to fill vacancies.

The programme consists of three phases:

1. The trust identifies local refugees and asylum seekers wishing to return to practice via a local charity. Due to the scheme’s success applicants also directly contact the trust from word of mouth or seeing media articles. Applicants are provided with a range of support including tuition for personal development planning and English language testing. They also have access to clinical mentors: British Medical Association (BMA) and General Medical Council (GMC) guidance and funding for Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) exams, GMC registration, childcare and travel expenses.

2. Individuals are given tailored open-ended clinical attachments with enhanced clinical supervision. They are supported with a clinical education programme including simulation, bedside and classroom teaching. This enables them to learn and develop their communication skills, clinical examination techniques and how to prescribe. Individuals are also taught ethics and the structure of the NHS.

3. For those candidates who have gained their GMC registration, they are given career advice and support in applying for jobs. They will also have access to the trust’s programme for overseas doctors to support transition into UK practice.
Why it works

The programme has been robustly evaluated which has contributed to a continuous learning and improvement model. Learnings from the first cohort led to adaptations of the programme including more pastoral and administrative support which was crucial to the programme’s success.

Three key elements have been identified for success:

- Learner characteristics – the individual’s motivation and personal resilience.
- A supportive organisational culture, driven by strong leadership.
- The correct training programme with clear goals and ongoing user support.

REPOD has been a successful so far due to strong partnerships with external organisations, embedding a compassionate culture across the trust and using a strong evaluation model.

“When I first settled in Teesside I worked in a number of different jobs, including in cash and carry and as a pizza delivery driver. I used to ask myself – ‘what am I doing here?’ I wanted to be a doctor, just as I had been back in Iraq and I wasn’t able to do that.

“This programme changed everything for me. They provided me with the support I needed to successfully become a doctor in the UK. I am now doing the job I love and couldn’t be happier.”

- Abdul, doctor hired through the scheme

Challenges

Healthcare professionals seeking asylum in the UK face many of the same challenges as any individual from overseas, such as differences in culture, language and clinical practice. They may have had time out of clinical practice and due to their personal circumstances in leaving their home country, could require extra clinical and pastoral support, both for them and their families.

Key challenges for the trust included the time and resources required by staff supporting the programme as well as other practical issues such as English language requirements, obtaining the necessary documents, security checks and administration support.
Key outcomes

Both the 2016 and 2017 cohorts had 12 participants in each. Due to the success of the programme the trust is now supporting a third cohort of individuals.

The trust has successfully employed two doctors from the programme. A further five have passed PLAB1 and three have passed PLAB2 and registered with the GMC. Seven individuals have passed language requirements and many are awaiting exam results and beginning clinical placements.

Top tips

✓ Develop strong partnerships with other organisations who can provide additional support and expertise to the refugee programme such as the BMA, HEE and local charities.
✓ Ensure everyone involved is clear about what the outcomes of the programme are.
✓ Have a clear plan for how you will support the administration of the programme including the necessary resources to process applications and provide the right level of support for candidates.
✓ Engage your current staff in the programme to create a supportive culture within the organisation which will help the candidates settle in and feel part of the team.
✓ Evaluate the programme on an ongoing basis to ensure continual improvements can be made.
✓ Work with other NHS organisations who have set up similar programmes for advice and support.

Further information and how to get involved

For more information and to find out about events NTHFT are running and how you can develop a similar scheme please contact Julie Egan via Julie.Egan2@nhs.net

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