WEST LONDON MENTAL HEALTH
NHS TRUST
USING DATA TO INFORM RETENTION INTERVENTIONS

The organisation

West London Mental Health NHS Trust (WLMHT) employs more than 3,000 staff serving a population of more than 700,000 people across the London boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow. As well as community and inpatient mental health services, the trust is a leading national provider of forensic (secure) and specialist mental healthcare.

Background

WLMHT faced a challenge retaining its staff. The trust’s data showed that 41 per cent of leavers had typically only stayed in the trust for up to two years.

Feedback from the trust’s exit survey showed that the main reasons why staff were leaving related to career development (29 per cent), personal growth (26 per cent) and reward and recognition (24 per cent).

Steps to success

The trust recognised that the first step to addressing the retention challenge was to collect data on why staff were leaving. The trust decided to work with Great with Talent - a company that develops tailored services that focus on improving staff engagement and retention.

A survey template was provided. The trust used this to make some adjustments to meet its own needs such as separating induction data into corporate and local. After the trust identified what data would be useful when tackling its retention challenge, Great with Talent designed a survey to be completed by new starters and leavers.

In July 2017, the trust began using the survey to ask starters and leavers about their experience of working at the trust. The information extracted from the surveys provided important statistical insights into what staff expected from the trust upon joining and the reasons staff were choosing to leave. These insights were instrumental in shaping WLMHT’s retention strategy.
From this work, the trust introduced a range of interventions to tackle the key reasons for staff leaving.

**Internal promotions**

The trust began tracking the number of staff promoted each month to showcase how many staff developed and progressed within the trust. A list of employees who have been promoted is now uploaded to the staff intranet each month, highlighting the position they have been promoted to. Promoted staff received a personally written letter from the chief executive, congratulating them on their achievement. The learning and development team also supply an information pack to ensure that promoted staff are supported in their new roles.

**Talent pool**

The trust has introduced a way for employees to put themselves forward to join a talent pool, which is linked to critical posts they may aspire to. In a transparent process, line managers score an application to see if the applicant has exceeded expectations in their current role and can progress onto the talent pool. Unsuccessful applicants have the option of appealing the decision and can receive detailed feedback. Those in the talent pool have personalised development plans linked to their career aspirations and have access to a range of new development opportunities such as executive and career coaching, strategic awareness training and their own talent and career development hub and app.

**Stay interviews**

The trust alerts line managers when it is time for an employee’s stay interview. Exit data showed that staff began thinking about and considering their careers around their first and second year work anniversaries. Line managers and new starters both receive an alert via their intranet when a new starter has been at the trust for nine and 18 months. The prompt comes with guidance that managers can print and use to discuss in their face-to-face meeting.

**Induction and onboarding**

New starters had noted that they were not sure of what their route through the organisation would look like. To address this, the trust made changes to its introductory presentation and created an employee handbook. The changes showed the trust’s strategy and how new starters can progress while in the organisation as well as the development opportunities available.

**Happy leavers and WLMHT alumni**

The trust is aware that normal levels of attrition are healthy, and staff will leave the organisation. However, the trust is keen to ensure that these staff are happy leavers. The first round of data showed that 50 per cent of leavers fell into this category and would recommend the trust as a place to work.
The trust set up an alumni group to enable it to keep in touch with leavers who may wish to return. The group is communicated with twice a year via email, as well as notified of employment opportunities when they arise.

Challenges

With such a wide range of interventions, one of the biggest challenges was ensuring full implementation across the trust. The organisation development (OD) team is responsible for ensuring that they are effectively embedded and continue to be used. Maintaining this a key focus for the trust in the coming year, rather than seeking to implement new interventions.

The other challenge was to ensure that those in the OD and workforce teams were supportive of the interventions and fully understood the intended impact and value they were adding. This involved lots of communication sessions with the teams.

Results

- The most recent exit data shows that members of staff leaving within the first two years has reduced from 41 per cent to 24 per cent.
- Evaluating the impact of these interventions is in the initial stages, but an early indicator showing success is that engagement with new starters has increased by 21 per cent.
- Anecdotal evidence shows that personalised cards congratulating promotions have been greatly received by staff.

Next steps

The OD team will now focus on measuring the impact of the interventions to assess which are having the most impact. The key focus will be on maintaining and sustaining the positive curve in reducing leavers within their first two years and ensuring the trust attracts new staff.
Top tips

✔ Use data to make fewer, but more focused interventions. A focus on fewer interventions also allows for better evaluation of how successful interventions have been.

✔ Online surveys do not reduce the importance of exit interviews, but they do provide a mechanism for open and honest feedback which is not always possible to obtain from face-to-face interviews.

Further information

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