

**MEDICAL
ASSOCIATE
PROFESSIONS**

Physician Associates

Aintree University Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

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The challenge

Health Education England (HEE) North West region undertook a local reorganisation of junior doctors in response to Foundation for Excellence and the Shape of Training Report. Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust lost a number of training posts across its medical specialities which were further compounded by the trust's inability to recruit trust doctors to backfill gaps.

The organisation recognised that an alternative solution was required and so, it undertook a multi-professional workforce review with the aim of improving compliance with trainee doctor rotas to deliver safe patient care.

In order to maintain the normal level of patient care in a range of settings, there is evidence that alternative roles can support the challenge to deliver safe effective patient care and treatment and provide a quality educational experience. Support for the development of such professional roles was identified in Aintree's People and Organisational Development Plan 2016-2017.

What the trust did

In March 2018, Aintree employed four physician associates (PA) at mid-point band 6, increasing to band 7 following a year of preceptorship (this was the model HEE North West advocated at the time).

The trust has seen these posts as providing some stability, ensuring a return on investment for the PA sponsorship and being a more viable long-term solution to recruitment. These posts can backfill foundation year (FY) 1/2 rotas, Monday to Friday, releasing trainees to cover the on-call period. This not only reduces the requirements to backfill vacancies with post foundation fellows (PFF), but when recruitment to PFFs is unsuccessful, it reduces the locum spend. These posts are available to provide clinical support on foundation training days, thus improving service delivery.

Clinical placements

Working in partnership with HEE North West, Aintree became a sponsoring organisation for the physician associates pilot programme. It supported four students over a two-year programme to develop clinical skills required to successfully complete the course. In its role, Aintree sponsored the academic costs of training for the students on the PA studies course and received payment from HEE via the Learning and Development Agreement (LDA) for providing clinical placements.

The trust's multi-professional workforce lead worked with consultant colleagues to co-ordinate placements and provide the students with timetables and placement information in advance of their placement. The trust has received feedback from the students that they value the receipt of this information in advance as it helps them prepare for their placement.

Recruitment

The posts were initially advertised in October 2017 through NHS jobs, communicated locally to HEE, clinical placement leads at the University of Liverpool, and to the students on placement at Aintree.



Aintree identified a consultant PA Lead. The PA lead, working with consultant colleagues from the acute medical unit (AMU) and emergency department (ED) developed interview questions and scoring criteria. The interview panel included these consultants and an advanced nurse practitioner.

Following a selection process, the trust successfully filled the four posts. However, one of the physician associates did not successfully complete the national exam. Following a discussion with HEE and clinical leads, the trust agreed to honour the contract of employment but commenced the PA at band 5 using the remainder of the funding for additional support and education provided within the clinical area.

Induction

The PAs attended a two and half day trust induction which included mandatory and statutory training. In addition to this, the clinical education team provided training and assessment of their clinical competencies.

How the PAs work

Rotation

In order to maintain the PAs generalist skills, the organisation felt the areas most suited to doing this would be across assessment areas such as AMU and the surgical assessment unit (SAU). The four PAs were put on a two-year rotational programme (18 months AMU / six months SAU). The funding for these posts came from both acute emergency medicine and surgical directorates. The PAs work Monday to Friday within the medical rotas.

Line management supervision

The PAs are supervised and supported by a consultant clinical supervisor, who provides them with feedback around their performance, and helps to develop plans to aid continuous professional development (CPD). The consultant PA lead is a point of contact (educational supervisor) outside of the clinical area. For the purpose of annual leave/sickness, the PAs report to office manager / rota co-ordinators.

Education and training

To help support the first year of employment, a competency criteria document used for trainee advanced nurse practitioners has been adapted for use by PAs. This means the PAs have a clear structured portfolio based competency document that will be regularly assessed by their clinical and educational supervisors. Part of this will require clinical assessments similar to case-based discussions (CBD) / mini-clinical examinations, and senior medics are encouraged to support completion of these. PAs are also assigned half a day CPD time which will be used to reflect on cases they have seen to continue their professional development.

Student PAs can shadow the PAs during their working shifts and PAs can support the students' educational needs.



Appraisal is undertaken following 12 months of employment using Aintree's electronic appraisal system. The PAs are also looking into whether they can access HORUS which is the e-portfolio system used by junior doctors.

Communication to staff

At first there was some nervousness from staff as they did not fully understand the role. However, the trust's multi-professional workforce project lead worked with consultant colleagues and members of the quality improvement team to engage with staff to raise awareness of the student PAs and the benefits of providing them with training throughout the course of the two-year training programme. This involved an article in the trust's magazine which is communicated to all staff, at trust education meetings and via education events.

Challenges

Continuous professional development

The trust recognises that PAs do not have access to developmental funding to aid CPD to remain fit to practice in the same way as junior doctors.

The trust's consultant PA lead is now in discussion with HEE regarding access to developmental opportunities on a regional basis. In addition, trust leads have recently joined a north west PA employer group (acute) which is co-ordinated by HEE. CPD is one of the agenda items for this group.

Investigation tests

Initially the radiology department refused requests for ultrasound scans from PAs, which had an impact on their ability to provide continuity of care. The staff within the department did not fully understand the role of PAs and what they were authorised to do. The trust quickly resolved this by holding a discussion with the staff within radiology to alleviate any concerns and answer any questions they had around the role.

Next Steps

Evaluation and feedback

The multi-professional workforce lead plans to work with clinical and educational supervisors, trust PA lead and PAs to evaluate the role. Once this is completed, Aintree will have a better understanding of the PA role within its departments which can then be communicated to the wider organisation. The evaluation should also measure the impact on colleagues, patients and the service.

One of the PAs working in surgery received an employee of the month award. His colleagues nominated him for making such a significant and positive impact to the ward in such a short period of time. This is also reflected in feedback from the trust's divisional workforce education groups.

The University of Liverpool is no longer accepting new students for its physician associate studies postgraduate diploma. From September 2019 this will transfer to Edge Hill University and Chester University. Aintree PA lead and consultant educational supervisors have already engaged with Edge Hill University to share ideas and suggestions on how the course can be improved.