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RECRUITING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

Guidance for NHS employers
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Volunteers are individuals who choose to commit their time and energy to support the work of the NHS, without receiving any financial benefit beyond reimbursement of expenses. Volunteers take part in a variety of roles that enhance the services to patients provided by paid staff, while also helping the NHS to improve and develop services. Typical roles for volunteers include befriending, peer support, hospitality and entertainment but more recently trusts have been engaging their volunteers in more specialised areas such as theatres, accident and emergency (A&E) and maternity units. See page 4 for a comprehensive list of examples of volunteering roles in the NHS.

In 2013 the King’s Fund surveyed 99 NHS acute trusts in England on the scale and value of volunteering. Some of the key findings from the research are below:

— The acute trusts surveyed have on average 471 volunteers. Scaled up, this equates to more than 78,000 volunteers across all acute trusts in England, contributing more than 13 million hours per year.

— The numbers of volunteers in each NHS acute trust varied from 35 to 1,300.

— The volunteer profile has changed over the past five years, with new volunteers tending to be younger and more ethnically diverse.

— All the respondents saw volunteering as a growth area with 87 per cent expecting the number of volunteers to increase over the next three years.

— Respondents felt that volunteers played a critical role in improving patient experience. But most trusts recognise that they were not doing enough to measure this impact more formally.

— The survey data analysis suggested that for the average trust, every pound invested in volunteering could yield around £11 in added value. But trusts need a more sophisticated approach for measuring the value of volunteering and need to include patient experience and quality of care.

Read the full report Volunteering in acute trusts in England on the King’s Fund website.

You can find useful resources on developing roles for volunteers from National Council for Voluntary Organisation’s (NCVO) website.
EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEERING ROLES IN THE NHS

- Ambulance first responder
- Arts and crafts (knitters, blanket makers, art therapists)
- Befriending/buddying (in-patients and community)
- Buggy service for outpatients with mobility problems
- Carer support
- City guides (guides who conduct hospital tours)
- Discharge lounge assistant
- Drama assistant
- Events helpers
- Expert patient
- Flower arrangers/flower care on wards
- Fundraising
- GP patient participation group members
- Governance and trustees
- Home escorts for vulnerable patients
- Hospital radio presenters and request collectors
- Interpreters
- Knitters for premature babies
- Librarians
- Meet and greet/welcomers
- Occupational therapy activities assistants
- Pets as Therapy (PAT) dogs/animal visits
- Plain language volunteers (to de-jargon written materials)
- Reception/Information/Enquiry desk/Welcome desk
- Social events organisers/.helpers
- Speech and language volunteers
- Support groups for specific health conditions
- Tea bar/café/bar
- Trolley service (for example meals, drinks, toiletries, newspapers)
- Ward and department volunteers (various, including A&E, Outpatients, Occupational health, X-ray)
- Wheelchair pushers
Your Volunteer Policy

If you are recruiting volunteers directly, you should have a clear volunteer policy that describes your organisation’s commitment to volunteers and volunteering and demonstrates a consistent approach. The policy should:

— provide clear guidance about the management of volunteers
— outline entitlements, roles and responsibilities for volunteers and key members of staff involved in volunteer services
— outline the support that is necessary for volunteers
— describe the specific requirements for the recruitment, placement and retention of volunteers.

When volunteers enter your organisation it is important that they have a written agreement focussing on expectations. While volunteers should be afforded the same respect and care as employees, it should be clear that the organisation has a different, non-contractual relationship with them.

Volunteers should be included in organisation-wide policies such as health and safety, but not policies which deal with equal opportunities, grievances, or disciplinary matters. Separate procedures, distinct from those for paid staff, should be produced specifically for volunteers.

The lessons learned report[^2] which looked into Jimmy Savile’s role as both a volunteer and a fundraiser in the NHS, included the following recommendations with specific links to volunteering and should be taken into account when considering policy arrangements.

— All NHS trusts should review their voluntary services arrangements and ensure that they are fit for purpose; volunteers are properly recruited, selected and trained and are subject to appropriate management and supervision; and all voluntary services managers have development opportunities and are properly supported.
— All NHS trusts should ensure that their staff and volunteers undergo formal refresher training in safeguarding at the appropriate level at least every three years.

[^2]: For advice and guidance about developing a policy and what to include, visit the National Council Voluntary Organisation’s [NCVO](https://www.ncvo.org.uk) KnowHowNonProfit website.
RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Advertising for volunteer posts is similar to advertising for any position. Advertisements should:

— meet all the same equality and diversity criteria as a paid post
— set out what the role is and what it involves in terms of time and commitment and what a volunteer might gain from the experience
— refer to whether the post will be subject to a criminal record check by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

TOP TIP Information on NHS Employment Check Standards can be found on NHS Employers’ website.

Volunteers are subject to immigration controls as set out by UK Visas and Immigration. People from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) who have a visa to work or study in the UK can do voluntary work subject to any restrictions as stated on their visa. People on a standard visitor visa are not permitted to volunteer. For further information see the Visa and Immigration section of Gov.uk’s website.

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

All volunteers should have an induction and training programme appropriate to the role they will undertake. Inductions provide an important opportunity to introduce volunteers to your organisation, communicate relevant policies and procedures and set out both what is expected of them and what they can expect in their new role.

The National Association of Voluntary Services Managers (NAVSM) has developed guidelines in conjunction with Skills for Health that set out requirements that are proportionate to the role of volunteers. Read the guidelines on National Association of Voluntary Services Managers’ website.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Good quality volunteer management, coordination and support are essential for encouraging a diverse range of people to volunteer and to ensure that their input is safe and contributes positively to patient care.

Volunteers who are both well managed and supported are more likely to stay with an organisation, building their skills and knowledge and contributing to effective and value-for-money services. Good volunteer management also ensures that risk is managed effectively.

Working with volunteers should be a rewarding experience for staff and volunteers alike. It is important for the success of a volunteer programme that staff feel comfortable working alongside volunteers and feel able to support them in their role. It is equally important that volunteers feel welcome, valued and enjoy the role they play in delivering services in the NHS.

The majority of trusts employ volunteer service managers or coordinators who have responsibility for recruiting volunteers, as well as developing policies, carrying out risk assessments and ensuring volunteers have the appropriate training. More on these roles can be found on National Association of Volunteer Services Managers’ website.
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has almost 1,000 volunteers who support the trust across its 11 hospitals. The volunteers have more than 25 roles that they undertake in various wards and departments as well as the shops run by the Hospital Volunteer Service (HVS), meet and greet service at main entrances and a hospital buggy service to transport visitors to the wards. The trust is grateful for the valuable contribution that the volunteers make to the trust and every year it hosts award ceremonies at its hospital sites.

Special badges and signed certificates are awarded to volunteers who have completed between five and 30 years of service. The chief executive and a non-executive director who is chair of the charitable funds committee, attend this event and other volunteering evenings throughout the year in recognition of the high regard with which the volunteer service is held. Each year at a staff awards event the trust selects its volunteer of the year. Anne Ward, Volunteer of the Year 2014, has been a volunteer for 30 years and has worked side by side with the trust’s volunteer development officer to develop the volunteer service. She said: “I have enjoyed every minute of being a volunteer. It has filled a hole in my life, particularly in recent years, and I would recommend it to anyone and everyone.”

Volunteer Rosalinde Herron helps to run Hexham General Hospital’s shop in the busy entrance atrium. Profits from the shop go directly back into the hospital to provide the extras that improve the experience of their patients. Rosalinde has volunteered since 1997 and works regular shifts each month. As she lives in the town she takes pride in helping her local hospital. She told us: “I really like the company and look forward to meeting up with the other volunteers who I regularly work with. It’s a great way to get out and about and I’m doing something to help my community.” Rosalinde met TV presenter Carol Malia (pictured) when she came to Hexham General Hospital to officially open the new HVS shop.

Volunteers Pauline Curwen and David Young enjoy helping out at A&E, chatting to patients who might be waiting for transport home or waiting for transfer to a ward. They help pass the time with the patient, offering them cups of tea and a chat with a friendly smile. Patients have fed back that this really does make a difference, having a friendly face to talk to and someone who can help to sort things out for them. Pauline, who is also an experienced meet and greet volunteer really enjoys being able to help people. She said: “People can be quite anxious when they are in hospital and if by getting them a cup of tea and sitting down for a chat I can make them feel better, that’s great. I find volunteering is really rewarding, knowing that you can make a difference to someone’s day – especially if they are under the weather or a little anxious. I love what I do.”
The trust’s volunteer team is made up of a diverse range of people who have qualities such as friendliness, reliability and a genuine wish and willingness to help. The services offered by volunteers complement the healthcare provided by staff and bring many benefits to patients, their families and visitors.

Volunteers undertake a wide variety of activities including:

— meeting and greeting patients and visitors and directing or escorting people around the hospital

— helping with the completion of menu cards on the wards, keeping information boards and racks tidy and up to date

— reading the newspaper to patients, doing handicrafts or art activities and talking to patients

— assisting wards and departments with clerical tasks.

Gloucestershire’s voluntary services manager Julie Pointer ensures that all volunteers are well placed and receive the right training and support to guarantee the best possible service while supporting patients, carers, visitors and staff. Julie explains: “Our volunteers love coming into the hospital knowing that they are making a real difference to people’s lives. We are proud of our volunteers and the enormous contribution they make.”

Andrew Jones is part of a team of volunteers who works at the reception desk by the main entrance at Cheltenham General Hospital.

Andrew has a warm, engaging approach to his volunteering role. He explains that the team works together to do its utmost to offer the best possible service to the patients and visitors:

“I have been a volunteer now for two-and-a-half years but worked for the trust before that. What really attracted me to the volunteer team was my wife’s medical care during her illness; she had 14 years with MS and her medical care was second to none. I don’t know if any others are in the same position: I just wanted to give something back.

Being a part of the Meet and Greet team is so rewarding – you have people coming in anticipating results or upcoming treatment and when they come in, you size them up and try to get them to relax if possible while we escort them to where they need to go. I think the most important thing is to try to ensure their visit is as stress-free as possible and I think we do a good job of that.

People come through the door and sometimes are not able to walk very far and we have to think about how we are going to help; some people require lifts or a wheelchair.”

Andrew adds: “The fact we can assist and help people is so rewarding and I feel so good when I come to work here. It is wonderful to be able to help people in their transitions. It is a wonderful job: I don’t need pay! My reward is when people say thank you!” Although he admits, not everybody does: “You can understand that though because it is a stressful time for them and they are often unwell.”

Andrew Jones is part of a team of volunteers who works at the Cheltenham General Hospital.
USEFUL LINKS

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) provides practical support on a wide range of topics for volunteer – involving organisations from creating your volunteering policy to recruiting and supporting volunteers. They can also provide training and consultancy to help you develop your approach. Visit NCVO’s website.

Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is a world-class research and consultancy agency specialising in volunteering. They undertake research, consultancy and evaluation projects to help improve policy and practice. You can read free volunteering reports and evaluations on IVR’s website.

National Association of Voluntary Services Managers (NAVSM) is a membership organisation that exists to support and develop best practice in volunteer management in the NHS and healthcare to enhance the experience of patients, carers, the public and staff. Members have access to NAVSM hubs for networking and training workshops as well as information and support to enable them to develop and maintain volunteering in a range of different healthcare settings across primary, acute, mental health, children’s, maternity, specialist and partnership organisations affiliated to the NHS. Visit NAVSM’s website.

Health Careers shares information on accessing various careers within healthcare but also on how volunteering can add value to this. Visit Health Careers’ website.

REFERENCES

1. NHS, 2014, Five year forward view, pp13-14
3. National Association of Voluntary Services Managers, 2013, Guidelines for volunteer induction, statutory and mandatory training
The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

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