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BUCKINGHAMSHIRE HEALTHCARE NHS TRUST USING DATA TO IMPROVE NURSE RETENTION

Background

In 2016, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT) had a high number of nurse vacancies as a result of 308 nurses leaving the trust that year. With a shortage of nurses nationally limiting recruitment options, the team had to increase their efforts in retaining the current workforce. As a first step, it was clear that the trust needed to find out why nurses were leaving the organisation and what could be done to reduce attrition in the future.

How they did it

Recognising that the trust had high nurse turnover (16.8 per cent in January 2016), BHT collated additional information from exit interviews, the NHS Staff Survey, the NHS Staff Friends and Family Test, and patient surveys. This data enabled the trust to better understand the needs of its nursing workforce, identify areas that needed support and improvement, and how these correlated with nurses' reasons for leaving.

BHT knew that any retention strategy had to be based on local intelligence and be relevant and current. The trust created a series of 12 focus groups of existing nurses to identify:

- their reasons for joining the trust
- their expectations and whether they had been met
- what factors would make people leave the organisation
- what factors might influence decisions to stay.

The focus groups were facilitated by HR and the education, learning and development teams, who led the nurses in exploring what they were dissatisfied with and how the trust could start making improvements to address this.

The feedback identified a variety of reasons why a nurse would decide to leave. This included poor line management, staffing levels, not feeling supported, the stress of the job, poor work-life balance, a lack of professional development, a lack of appreciation and not having time to look after their patients properly.

It was also identified that having a good relationship with a line manager, being able to rotate without resigning, feeling valued and recognised, opportunities for

flexible working, and understanding the trust's objectives and how to support them positively impacted a nurse's reasons to stay.

BHT created a nurse retention action plan highlighting 25 areas. This approach enabled the trust to tailor a number of actions to specific groups of nurses and to address the feedback from the focus groups. Some of the key priorities of the plan to retain staff are as follows.

- Approximately a third of the nursing workforce were aged over 50, which meant focusing on supporting this staff group to work longer by developing flexible retirement options and equipping managers to understand and support an older workforce.
- 36 per cent of nurses leave the trust in their first two years. A key reason for this was due to the trust's proximity to London and being seen as a stepping stone. The trust has a robust one year preceptorship programme, which is well received by staff. Following this work, they have committed to extending the programme into a second year. They have also included a more structured approach for the recruitment team to check in with staff three, six, nine and 12 months after appointment to resolve any issues at an early stage.
- 'Itchy feet' programme - BHT has made it easier and simpler for staff to move around internally, before advertising a role externally. The learning and development team provide a confidential career development conversation particularly for Band 5 and 6 nurses to discuss opportunities in the trust and the support that can be offered to them. The trust is also tracking staff movement around the organisation to collate further data and make improvements to this process.
- New staff also receive a thank you card from colleagues which recognises when staff are going the extra mile.
- Sickness absence case managers were given responsibility for exit interviews, which has helped to increase completion rates.

Get support from your executive team

To gain support for the nurse retention agenda, the business case for retention was illustrated to the trust strategic workforce committee – comparing relative costs of recruitment, temporary staffing and retention. The committee is now presented with and has responsibility for reviewing the retention action plan on a bimonthly basis.

On top of this, a dedicated retention lead was recruited initially for three months to continue the work of the retention plan. More recently the role was extended for another 12 months. The key here was being committed to securing funding.

Challenges

The trust has identified risks and challenges to nurse retention, including:

- neighbouring trusts receive London weighting payments, but Buckinghamshire Healthcare does not, potentially having a detrimental effect on whether or not nurses stay
- the trust is monitoring the impact of the changes to nurse degree funding.



Outcomes

Nurse retention improved by 2 per cent from January 2016 to December 2016, although it should be noted that this figure continues to fluctuate.

BHT has achieved this by taking the time to identify the specific needs and concerns of nurses before starting to formulate or implement any actions.

A deep dive into data has been the key to improving nurse retention. The focus groups were particularly influential, along with gaining executive buy-in, in leading the trust to create a nurse retention plan which focused on meeting the needs of nurses and reducing attrition.

In addition, the trust has been able to evidence a significant reduction in recruiting and funding temporary and agency staff.

Top tips

- ✓ Collect relevant local and current data.
- ✓ Don't just look at turnover data, triangulate this with other data such as the NHS Friends and Family Test, the NHS Staff Survey results and data that's been provided directly from your workforce.
- ✓ Know your workforce needs *before* creating a strategy.
- ✓ Get buy-in from your executive team. This helps to strengthen commitment to the agenda.
- ✓ Be creative and don't take no for an answer!
- ✓ Ensure that there is someone leading and owning the action plan – hold people to account.

Further information

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