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ROYAL SURREY COUNTY HOSPITAL NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

REDUCING AGENCY SPEND THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE MOBILE APP

The organisation

The Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust serves 320,000 people locally and a wider population of 1.3 million for cancer services.

Each year 3,500 staff care for 260,000 patients and the annual income of the trust is £257 million.

The challenge

The NHS faces many challenges in relation to how it overcomes long-standing workforce supply issues and deliver health and social care differently across communities for the future.

For many reasons, numbers of doctors and nurses required in the NHS have not increased in line with patient demand. An effect of this has been high agency spend which costs the NHS £3 billion a year and is a regular feature in the media.

In 2014/15 the Royal Surrey Country Hospital spent £16.8 million on agency staff. In October 2015 and December 2015, the trust filled just 14 vacant shifts in general medicine with its own staff, resulting in high agency usage.

What the trust did

Two trainee doctors, Dr Shahrabani and Dr Andreou, were frustrated with how shifts were rostered and the associated costs incurred in relation to agency spend. Dr Shahrabani decided to act and spoke to the Associate Director of HR at Royal Surrey, Nikki Hill. Working together Dr Shahrabani and Dr Andreou developed an innovative mobile app for bank staff, designed to help the trust with its temporary staffing through the effective deployment of existing staff. The doctors, having worked as locums, felt that the hospital would achieve a better service and higher staff satisfaction if it provided an opportunity whereby clinicians could directly arrange their own shifts with the departments.

Next steps

Nikki was keen to work with the doctors, who were confident they could improve productivity and efficiency in the trust, and offered Royal Surrey as a pilot site

It took six months for Dr Shahrabani and Dr Andreou to build the Locum's Nest mobile app, which matched locum availability with demand. The app was initially rolled out to the trust's general medicine department to manage gaps in shifts but was then rolled out to various departments who previously had struggled with filling their gaps in their rotas. The app is now used across all specialties at the trust.

Following a number of conversations, colleagues 15 miles away at Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust decided to use the app and launched it in February 2017. In May 2017 both trusts established a collaborative bank using the app.

How does the app work?

Locum's Nest reduces the need for agency staff by bridging the gap between the availability of clinicians and gaps in medical rotas. The mobile platform displays all available shifts at a trust which are then viewed by doctors signed up to the app. They can choose to apply to a shift, alerting the medical department who then approve the request resulting in the shift being booked.

The cost to the trust is £15 per shift, with zero upfront outlay and no licensing fees. Locum's Nest operates on a pay as you go arrangement.

Results

Use of the Locum's Nest App has proved extremely successful. In 2016, Royal Surrey opened a winter pressures ward to cope with the increased number of patients. The ward was safely staffed purely by doctors who had applied through Locum's Nest for 27 days during the winter period.

The app is now being used by every department in the trust and the neighbouring Ashford and St Peter's. The collaboration between the two organisations means that over 2,800 clinicians in the wider geography are now subscribed and, to date, over 5,000 shifts have been filled. Ashford and St Peter's have saved around £150,000 so far and filled over 2000 gaps in rotas. In the medical department alone, the trust is now able to fill more than sixty per cent of shifts with staff from the local area – prior to the app, they struggled to fill four per cent.

Shift attendance rates are so far 100 per cent.

Top tips

- ✓ Ensure that there is senior level commitment to introducing the process and continuing the momentum
- ✓ Engage with managers and staff to ensure that the internal processes support the effective use of bank staff via the app
- ✓ Before launching a collaborative bank – ensure that both/ all organisations are clear about how the process will work (e.g. clearances/ rates etc.)

Further information

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