

MAY 2012

HEALTH AND WELLBEING FEATURE TRUST YORK TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Background

York Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust provides acute services for approximately 350,000 people living in and around York and also a range of specialist services over a wider catchment area of around 500,000 people in North Yorkshire. The trust employs 4,500 staff and the trust's annual income is £235.5 million.

What we did and why

The trust needed to make savings of £33 million over three years - £12.2 million was required for the financial year 2010/11, which equates to a saving of approximately £30 per employee each week.

The project was initially established as a twelve-month project. A primary £100K investment was made in new posts in human resources and occupational health to:

- employ a HR adviser and senior OH adviser to act as champions on sickness absence, identifying and targeting areas with high levels of sickness and to assist line managers in proactively managing sickness absence in line with trust policy
- provide increased capacity in occupational health to facilitate fast-tracking for referrals
- provide increased capacity within the staff counselling service
- provide increased capacity for clinical psychology support for staff
- provide increased capacity for physiotherapy fast-track referrals.

The project commenced in April 2008 and following the success of year one and two, it was agreed that the project would continue for a third year. Owing to the additional savings that had been made, it was agreed that an additional HR post

could be funded for a year to promote the health and wellbeing agenda. A HR manager (0.6wte) started in this role in October 2010.

The sickness absence project remains in place in 2012 and is reviewed and developed by the Sickness Strategy Group. This work has since been recognised as a good example of best practice at the 'Leading Workforce Thinking Conference' in 2009, was runner up for HPMA award 2010, and has been included as a best practice example in the 'Health at Work – an independent review of sickness absence' report by Dame Carol Black and David Frost CBE published in November 2011.

On any one day, the average number of staff absent from the trust is 158 (headcount), this equates to a daily cost of £8,800, based purely on salary alone, the total cost of sickness would therefore be substantially higher. While recognising that directorates were required to manage their own cost improvement plans, it was acknowledged that by improving the health and wellbeing of staff, and reducing the costs of absence further, the £30 per employee saving per week could potentially be achieved through this project alone.

The key priorities over the last year of the project have been:

- continued board commitment
- engagement and ownership
- skills training to enable proactive management
- continued development of the sickness policy and related guidance
- making health and wellbeing everyone's business through initiatives such as participation in the Corporate Global Challenge and the introduction of health eating schemes.

As the NHS faces some of the toughest challenges in terms of both service changes and reduced resource, it was more important than ever for the trust to ensure they were supporting and enabling staff to be healthy and develop proactive sickness management in one of the most challenging areas of human resources that managers face on a daily basis.

How we did it

Board commitment had already been achieved with the demonstrable success of the project to date, but the focus turned to further enhancing this support. A range of approaches were used for this, including regular updates on progress with links to efficiency savings, as well as board involvement in initiatives. This included a board tasting session of healthy menu options as part of the healthy eating initiative and a board team participating in the Global Corporate Challenge (GCC) (The Boardwalkers).

High impact, interactive training was provided to continue engagement with managers focusing on supporting and promoting wellbeing. A full day training event, presented through the use of drama and using real life examples of

sickness issues was run for managers across all directorates. 118 managers attended the training, with 87 per cent of participants confirmed that they felt more confident following the event to deal with sickness absence issues.

To underpin this and enable employees to make a choice to improve their wellbeing, the trust subsidised 196 staff to participate in the GCC. The 16-week challenge is specifically designed to motivate employees to walk over 10,000 steps per day – a proven and recommended way to improve health and productivity. Participation in the GCC was voluntary and was open to all staff. Teams track their daily steps to undertake a virtual walk around the world. The GCC evaluated the impact of the challenge on participants. The trust also looked at sickness information and staff survey results to evaluate the impact. 94 per cent of staff achieved an average 10,000 steps per day, a 20 per cent increase in weekly exercise.

The biggest challenge of all was how to make health and wellbeing everyone's business. This was achieved by making it fun and easy for staff. The achieved benefits far outweighed what had been expected and has enabled the trust to demonstrate the value of continued investment in this project.

Results and next steps

At the start of year one of the project, the trust's quarterly sickness rate was 5.13 per cent. Over the three years that the project has been running, the trust has achieved a proportionate reduction in sickness absence of 32 per cent. This equates to having approximately 57 more FTE staff at work – nearly enough to cover two wards, therefore demonstrating the positive effect that this project has had on patient care.

The Boorman report states that the cost of a days absence to the NHS is £163, this includes salary and on costs. At the start of the project, the trust was losing approximately 52,717 days per year. This has now reduced to around 36000 days, a reduction of £2.71 million and a saving of approximately £5.58 million over the last three years.

In March 2011, the trust's annual sickness absence was 4.52 per cent, and is currently 3.19 per cent (September 2011) supporting the continued success of the sickness project. Long-term absence has fallen significantly – by 72 per cent for those off for four weeks or longer and 77 per cent for those absent for three months.

The continued focus on this has enabled us to deliver significant improvements across this agenda ensuring that we are clearly communicating that the wellbeing of our staff is our priority and this enables us to continue to provide high-quality patient care.

Quotes from the Board

"As a board we have a holistic appreciation of how supporting and enhancing the wellbeing of our staff is ultimately aligned to trust performance and achieving our mission of safe, effective and sustainable healthcare. A surprisingly wide range of factors seem to contribute towards this." Alan Rose - Chairman

"At a time when the NHS is making £20 billion of efficiency savings, the sickness project at York has played a significant and fundamental role in assisting our organisation in meeting its efficiency savings. By supporting the initiative with initial investment, the project quickly covered its own costs. The initiative went on to deliver further savings that, in effect, allowed the trust to staff the equivalent of an additional two wards with a continued and sustained reduction in days lost through sickness." Andrew Bertram - Finance Director.




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