“Rotational schemes boost skill development and job retention”

There is much evidence to show the high numbers of nurses who leave the profession within a short time of qualifying. By introducing a new scheme for newly qualified nurses at Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust we are hoping to improve both recruitment and retention. For the first year of employment, nurses are now employed by a locality instead of a service, allowing them to work across that locality in different settings and areas.

The benefits are threefold. First, and most importantly, we will be able to support newly qualified nurses in the transition period, giving us the chance to identify their strengths and skills. We appreciate the differences between being a student and a registered nurse – it is often only when you are qualified that you have a clear picture of your role and how you fit into a service. Many discover the area in which they thought they would love to practise is not for them. By offering this opportunity we hope it will give nurses more time to reflect on where they think they would really like to be as a registered practitioner. In the long term this will also benefit us as employers.

Second, it is about creating opportunities for nurses to work collaboratively and develop relationships and networks outside of the day-to-day environments. We can feel isolated when we move to specialty areas. I have worked in the NHS for over 20 years and one of the things I love about nursing is the flexibility and ability to change direction. However, I often hear nurses talking about how they would love to change but feel trapped as they have remained in a specialty for many years and fear they lack experience in other areas. Hopefully with this scheme we will be able to develop a more flexible and multiskilled workforce that will be adaptable. This is a clear need for the future workforce of the NHS. A side benefit would also be to strengthen and develop the feeling of community and support for nurses by knowing colleagues in other services and the challenges they face.

Finally, we must embrace change and become more flexible not only in how we deliver care, but also in how we develop a high-quality, highly trained workforce. Many nurses comment on how difficult it is to access training under current pressures. Now we have moved to degree-level training not all nurses want to pursue higher academic study; for many, family pressures do not allow the time. The opportunities that rotation brings – both in-house and to other external services and trusts – will encourage development, and consequently, improve the care that is provided.

With the current changes being faced in the NHS, we need to ensure we develop not only a highly skilled but also a flexible workforce, which will be able to support the transformational changes ahead. The rotational scheme will offer professional development for staff as well as creating a flexible and multiskilled workforce that will be able to adapt to change while still delivering high-quality care.

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