Local Training Success During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond

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Abstract

This study examines the training and development undertaken by pathology staff of all grades within East Suffolk North Essex NHS Foundation Trust (ESNEFT) over the financial years covering the Covid-19 pandemic. ESNEFT consists of Ipswich and Colchester hospitals (the pathology service from West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust was part of the ESNEFT network up to 31st October 2020).

Introduction

With the recognised national shortage of pathology staff, there is a requirement

Summary of the training – including current financial year to date:





East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust

to be able to "grow your own" within many NHS Trusts. In the East of England it has proven difficult to attract and retain qualified, competent staff due to the rural location, close proximity to London and the cap on agency costs within NHS England. Regionally within Suffolk and North East Essex (SNEE), there are additional issues within the population having significant number of patients with long term health issues and longevity impacting on pathology services. In order to accommodate this expected demand on the healthcare services, a 1.6% projected growth in the Healthcare Science workforce will be required by 2030^[1,2]. Impacting this, 21% of staff leaving the professions are aged under 55 and 12% are above 55 years, the situation is unsustainable unless workforce can be addressed.

East Suffolk North Essex NHS Trust (ESNEFT) have an effective "grow our own" culture which is reflected in the training supported by the pathology service over several financial years – this is audited annually:

2019 - 2020 105 applications supported 2020 - 2021 114 applications supported 2021 - 2022 186 applications supported 2022 - 2023 214 applications supported Over this period – only 2 applications were rejected.

These applications include Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) qualifications, non-accredited degree assessments, top up modules, degrees and apprenticeships. Degree assessments, top up modules and portfolios have been supported not only for substantive staff, but also for those on fixed term contracts and bank staff. ESNEFT has achieved 36 successful IBMS Certificate of Competence (CoC) verifications between April 2020 and February 2023 - despite the Covid-19 pandemic - 30 of these have achieved HCPC registration and are practicing with 20% (6/30) leaving to go to other Trusts. There is a forecasted total 60 CoC completions between 2019 and December 2023. This data does not include the 19 placement students that we supported with their portfolios between 2019 – 2022.

2019-2020 Banding of staff supported since 2019



Additionally, development in leadership, quality, training, wellbeing and project management have been supported for staff at all levels.

Methodology

Training applications within ESNEFT are managed by the service, along with a protected budget. Applications are submitted to a monthly training meeting for consideration. If approved, funding is provided were required. Study applications for development of colleagues were audited for the financial years 2019 – 2023. The information collated was then differentiated into the banding, discipline, location and courses that were applied for during the pandemic. The training within pathology is audited at the end of each financial year to understand the breakdown of the training and development undertaken.

Results

During the Covid-19 pandemic nationally much of the training was halted in order to support the increased workload and working conditions introduced to restrict the spread of the virus. Within ESNEFT, this opportunity was utilised to help reinforce and develop the workforce. University lecturers from the University of Suffolk delivered training to the microbiology consultants across the service in order to aid in the implementation of the Covid -19 testing service that was required. Students and recent graduates were recruited from local universities that were studying Biomedical Science courses and had completed the placement year as bank staff to help provide some of the laboratory assistant roles. Those that had not completed their CoC were supported with achieving this qualification. Some staff employed had non-accredited degrees which were supported for assessment and top up modules, followed by the CoC.

Conclusions

Whilst most of the training and development was captured - it is worth noting that there may be some CPD and development activities not captured through the process that the service supports. This was due to individuals joining the Trust after starting a particular qualification or where funding is provided from elsewhere.

This includes the Clinical Scientist training within ESNEFT:

- Two STP students that have completed their programme in 2023 (Clinical Chemistry)
- Two HSST students (Clinical Biochemistry and Microbiology)
- Two new STP students due to start September 2023 (Clinical Chemistry)
- Consultant Clinical Scientist development (Clinical Chemistry)

In order to ensure a competent adaptable workforce, there needs to be continued investment within the development of staff of all grades. This development does not necessarily require funding , however sufficient protected release time is critical. This can only be achieved with advanced planning, ensuring that requirements are included in performance development conversions. With the implementation of the new Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency coming into effect 1st September 2023^[3], there needs to be more opportunities to develop all registered staff (and those working towards registration) to develop leadership and wellbeing knowledge and understanding.

Of the temporary staff that were supported with development, ESNEFT lost around 25% to other trusts – many to promoted positions. The remaining staff were redeployed within the pathology service once the requirement for Covid-19 support was reduced.

References

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