

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust

Trainee Assistant Practitioner Role – Recruitment Case Study

Introduction

Combined Healthcare sought to appoint 7 new Trainee Assistant Practitioner roles as part of a regional programme to introduce the role into Trusts in the West Midlands. This was a new role development for the Trust, although we have some existing band 4 clinical staff in the form of STR workers and Therapy Technicians, with clear role differentiation being a key factor for consideration. The motivation behind the development was to release time to care for registered staff and bridge the gap between registered and non-registered roles, which was particularly important at the time. We were also introducing Band 2 HCSW roles. These, put together, would provide a clear development pathway for clinical staff within the bands 1 – 4 groupings. One generic job description was developed for all 7 roles. The objective was to strike a balance between this being an advanced Health Care Support Worker with Health Care Support Worker team leading responsibilities and a Discharge and Liaison Co-ordinator. The roles which were developed were within our 7 inpatient wards as at the time this was the area with the greatest staffing pressures and it was felt that the development of this new role would help to alleviate some of the pressure on registered staff. Participation in the regional focus and steering groups enabled us to take on board their experience and expertise in the development of our new roles.

Developing the Role

We approached senior managers across the Trust to gauge interest, informally communicating this development opportunity. We asked the managers –‘If you had a Band 4 member of staff, what would you want them to do - what skills and competencies would they need?’ This enabled us to ensure that their needs would be met by the educational element at the University, that tasks were within the band 4 range and not restricted to registered staff only. In this way managers were able to have input into developing the role. Ward managers felt that if we introduced the roles, discharge would be easier, bed occupancy would be reduced and registered staff would spend less time on paperwork.

The Recruitment Process

We sought formal expressions of interest internally for prospective TAP’s. An information pack was developed, which was available to prospective applicants and several points of contact were included in the information. In addition to this, the positions were advertised on NHS Jobs as ‘internal only’ vacancies. Shortlisting was undertaken by 2 Modern Matrons with support from the HR team. The recruitment process was via a single interview. Interviews were with a panel consisting of 2 Modern Matrons, a Human Resources representative and the intention was for attendance by a service user

representative, who unfortunately was not able to attend on the day. We interviewed 10 people for 7 posts and were able to appoint to all of those posts following the interview process. One of our applicants was external to the Trust, as they were seconded to one of our wards where we have staff from our Trust and a neighbouring Trust. We originally advertised for 6 TAP's but following the interviews, felt that there were 7 strong candidates and therefore worked with the Director of Workforce and Leadership to establish a 7th post to enable each of the inpatient areas to have a TAP role.

Lessons Learnt

Following appointment, one TAP decided that the role was not for them and therefore left the programme. The reason for their departure related to the academic standards and as such they took the decision not to continue with programme. This is an area we can improve upon for the future – providing more information about the academic demands of the course early in our engagement processes and prior to their acceptance of an offer. At the time, we struggled to find an appropriate test which would accurately assess their current skill levels around literacy and numeracy. In the future, we would seek to build literacy and numeracy testing into the recruitment process. It will also be beneficial to include an existing TAP in informal discussions with interested staff and on the interview panel for any further cohorts to provide an honest appraisal of their experiences and journey.

Another area that could be improved relates to role clarity. Even though the JD's were written by the Ward Managers, there was a lack of clarity about what the roles would be like in practice, and this caused some issues around ensuring the right support was available to meet early development needs. We also had feedback from the TAP's that they were starting to get burnt out because they were at work 4 days a week, at college 1 day a week and undertaking additional studies during the evening and weekends. Consequently they each individually approached their ward managers and gained agreement for additional study leave on an informal basis to support the course study requirements. Some of this time has been utilised by the TAP's to develop a mutual support network utilising tools such as action learning.

Recommendations

- Engage team managers in the development of the role and job description. Clarity around the purpose of the job are key to trainees settling into their role quickly and acceptance of the role within teams
- Involve existing trainees in engagement processes for future cohorts. A realistic description of the roles that they do, experiences of attending university to undertake the academic requirements of the course and the impact this has on their personal life will enable trainees to embrace the role with their eyes wide open

- As part of the recruitment process, undertake literacy and numeracy testing to ascertain current skill and knowledge levels and if trainees are likely to require any additional support with study skills
- Offer a study skills course prior to the commencement of the university course to help trainees re-engage with learning
- Review trainees experiences of their new roles, support mechanisms and how they are finding academic study. Be flexible in your approach to finding solutions to better support staff to help them maintain a work/life balance