

Fran Wilson

Lead Nurse for Attraction, Recruitment & Retention
Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The whole thing about flexibility is that it's a big cultural change so it isn't going to happen overnight. It's all about supporting line managers with their decision making and widening out people's vision so they're not just saying, 'No, that's not going to work'

Why did you apply for the NHS Flex For The Future?

I went on the webinar about the programme and realised that flexible working could help us with retention, attraction and recruitment in nursing, which would be brilliant. With the shortage of nurses we are experiencing nationally, GHT decided to concentrate on looking at flexible working in nursing because it's such a key area. The idea being that, over time, we would take what we learnt into other key staffing groups.

How did you form your change team?

The change team was made up of our key stakeholders and consisted of our Workforce Lead, Temporary Staffing Manager, Deputy Chief Nurse and Pathway to Excellence Programme Lead. We then invited representation from each of our divisions - Women's & Children's, Medicine, Surgery, Diagnostics & Specialties and Corporate - onto the wider change team. What naturally happened was that the people who were keen to get involved jumped on board the Flex to the Future journey!

How did you keep everyone engaged?

All of us on the change team attended the monthly workshops. Then, afterwards, we'd run the session again or deliver the key points to our wider group.

Were there many different perspectives in the group?

Very much so and the way different staff have approached flexible working in their divisions has been interesting to watch. It's especially been great to see staff having their lightbulb moments

and subtly changing their approaches to flexible working requests. One example was a staff member who'd requested to move to a term time contract because their husband was a teacher and they wanted to spend more time together in the school holidays. Their line manager said that in the past they would have immediately said, 'No, we don't do that here,' but instead they had a conversation about flexible working and what would work for both the staff member and the team and they've come to a nice compromise that they're both really happy with.

What was the biggest shift you noticed?

I was already convinced that flexible working is an area that will increase staff attraction and retention, but now I have participated in the programme I have the insight, knowledge and resources to share with other people, which really helps.

What did you find useful about the programme?

It was very well organised, very professional. The speakers were totally inspiring. Professor Joe Harrison, who is the Chief Exec in Milton Keynes was so inspirational that I encourage everyone who's interested to watch his talk. The pace and variety of each workshop made them easy to follow and kept my interest.



What changes has the programme inspired?

We would never have got to present at trust board without the programme, so it's really helped to raise the profile of flexible working and how we introduce it into more conversations. It has also inspired us to start conversations about flexible working from a point of yes and how, rather than no!

What's been the response from the board to your progress?

Really good. We presented them with an update on our programme journey and gave them some examples, through staff stories, of how things are already changing in all divisions. One member of the team talked about how she's never needed to work flexibly in the past but she recently started an art class on Wednesday afternoons so she's using the idea of flex to work her hours round it and it's working brilliantly. The board took it really well and liked the direction we're going in.

What have you achieved so far?

We're moving from having exit interviews to having stay interviews whenever people are considering leaving their jobs. That way, we can investigate what they actually want from their work life balance and see if we can accommodate it and help them to stay in their positions. We've also learnt to start discussions about flexibility from a position of 'yes'. Of course there are times when you'll have to say no to someone's request for a change in their working pattern but if you start from a position of 'yes' you're more likely to find a way to make change happen.

Have you made any other changes?

From our group of early adopters, we've now formed a flexible working, shared decision making council of about 15 people who meet every month. They're all enthusiastic about flexible working and can continue to enable change even after the programme has finished.

So, what's next?

We're currently using the Timewise resources in one of our surgical wards to improve team rostering. We're treating it as a pilot site then hopefully we can roll it out to other wards. I'm also looking at the vacancies in our acute medical unit. We want to make sure that the job adverts show that we're willing to work flexibly and encourage potential applicants to come and talk to us about what they need.

What challenges have you faced?

The whole thing about flexibility is that it's a big cultural change so it isn't going to happen overnight. It's all about supporting line managers with their decision making and widening out people's vision so they're not just saying, 'No, that's not going to work'. It's going to take years to change and embed but the progress we're making is exciting.

How would you improve the programme?

I really enjoyed the idea of the clinics and meeting up with other people from trusts in the South West but there weren't many people participating from the area so it wasn't as helpful as it could have been. But it does mean that we're flying the flag ahead of other people, so we'll be able to share what we've done in the future.

What advice would you give to any other organisations considering the programme?

I would say to make sure they have their programme team ready from the beginning and that the people on it fully understand what it's all about. You need to identify your early adopters, the people who are really passionate about flexibility and you need buy in and support at a senior level if you want to make change.

Would you recommend NHS Flex For The Future to others?

Definitely. It's been a great investment and I'd like to keep that link going with Timewise to help keep us on track. It was very professionally done; a positive experience.

