Over to you on flexible working

Linda Thomas

‘AT FIRST I was terrified. But it’s like riding a bike – you don’t forget.’ So says one of the return-to-practice nurses interviewed for our feature this week. It is clear from the experiences of those running and benefiting from return-to-practice courses that family friendly policies, more than any other factor – including pay – are crucial in attracting nurses back to nursing.

· Family friendly policies are also pretty crucial in retaining staff. So you might expect that it would be common sense for employers to ask existing staff just what kind of family friendly initiatives are most helpful to them.

Sensible employers who have done just that, reap the rewards in improved retention and recruitment of staff. In effect, if you don’t ask, you don’t get. So it is surprising to see the findings from a survey carried out by the NHS Pay and Workforce Research Agency. At the time of the survey, employers who had gone to the trouble of asking their staff what kind of family friendly policies they would like to see introduced were actually in the minority.

It is, of course, perfectly possible to introduce such policies without consulting staff: possible, but not necessarily wise. Even with the best of intentions, acting without asking may not be the best way forward. What seems like a friendly working environment to a well-meaning employer may appear distinctly hostile to an employee. As for nurses, it seems that employers are sometimes defeated at the thought of attempting to introduce flexible working for them. For a manager, piecing together the jigsaw of 24-hour nursing cover is difficult enough, apparently, without making the pieces even smaller and the jigsaw even bigger.

The point is, seeking the views of nurses and then acting on them so that the hours on offer are acceptable means more jigsaw pieces in the shape of nurses become available.

The government’s recent recruitment campaign has led to an upsurge in nurses undertaking return-to-practice courses. The courses are proving hugely popular and successful. It is those employers who are prepared to be flexible who benefit ultimately. Does your employer fit the bill? If not, why not? Over to you.

See feature page 17 and opinion page 22.

No lessons learned as more senior nurse posts lost

As the political pace hot up throughout the UK, nurses are being wooed left, right and centre by the various political parties. Shame, then, to see how badly senior nurses in Wales are faring at the moment.

Dozens of years of experience have been lost to the health service virtually overnight as trusts have appear not to have been learned.

It just seems ridiculous that on the one hand there is a shortage of nurses and a big push to recruit and yet on the other hand the career structure is being dismantled. Have no doubt that the political parties are not thinking short term. They will be looking to what is happening at the top and they will not like what they see.

See news page 7.

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