Passion and pride of new recruits revitalises permanent employees

By Erin Dean

Recruiting nurses from other countries and reducing the use of agency staff has helped boost morale at hospitals, according to senior nurses.

Kingston Hospital NHS Trust in south London has recruited 80 nurses from Northern Ireland over the past two years after struggling to fill band 5 vacancies, the Nursing Quality and Accountability conference heard.

Professional development lead Sarah Connor said the recruits’ professional passion and pride had revitalised the established nursing workforce. ‘They have made an enormous difference to the culture of the nursing staff,’ she added.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust chief nurse Flo Panel-Coates told the event, which was sponsored by Nursing Standard, that her trust recruited nurses from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Portugal to fill vacancies.

‘They brought a little bit of tenacity and it has had a huge impact on the staff in those areas,’ said Ms Panel-Coates, who helped turn the trust around after a clostridium difficile outbreak claimed dozens of lives.

Recruiting the nurses invigorated permanent employees, she said. ‘It also means there is less reliance on costly agency staff, and this has made a real difference.’

University College London Hospitals (UCLH) NHS Foundation Trust deputy chief nurse Nicola Ranger said her trust had saved £9 million between April 2010/11 by reducing its agency staff usage by 75 per cent. This was achieved by cutting the time it took to recruit staff, building up the number of bank staff and running a communications campaign within the trust. UCLH plans to use no agency nursing staff by the end of the year.

Waning ambition

Ms Ranger said quality indicators suggest the trust is performing well despite the savings.

Sheila McQueen, academic lead for continuing professional development at Northumbria University, told Nursing Standard that a trust in north-east England has not been able to fill its ward sister posts. ‘They are having to be advertised over and over again,’ she said.

Concerns about how to retain nurses’ enthusiasm for their work were raised at the event in London. Foundation of Nursing Studies chief executive Theresa Shaw said: ‘We have lost that real passion for being nurses and sense of pride. It is no surprise when I see how hard people have to work and how overwhelmed they feel.

But health minister Anne Milton, a former nurse, praised the ‘dedication and passion’ of nurses, which she said is driving positive change for NHS patients.

She told the event that leadership throughout the profession was vital, including the roles of chief nursing officer and director of nursing at the Department of Health. The postholders will have ‘the ear of ministers’, she said.

MIDWIVES’ FIRE SAFETY PROMOTION COMMENDED

A group of community midwives has been recognised for its partnership work with the local fire service to ensure new parents receive free home safety visits.

The Carlisle maternity unit from North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust won the Cumbria Council’s Fire and Rescue Service Award for excellence in partnership. It holds antenatal clinics in the community rooms at Carlisle fire station every week to help inform new parents about the home fire safety visit initiative.

Acting community maternity manager Meredith Jardine said the partnership has been mutually beneficial. ‘The clinic is in the city centre so it is easy for all women, including hard-to-reach and vulnerable expectant mothers, to access.’

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