The union steward role is all about working in partnership, writes Petra Kendall-Raynor

Involving staff in change management can increase motivation and productivity.

Often this leads to reduced staff turnover and, ultimately, improved patient outcomes, according to the RCN’s latest document on making the case for facilities agreements between employers and unions.

The college also says that union representatives provide employment relations expertise that can benefit members and employers.

Alyson Bartlam felt compelled to become a union steward after difficulties in her previous job arose because of organisational changes. ‘I started at my current trust about 12 years ago and thought it was time to do something to make a difference,’ she explains. ‘I have been an RCN steward for seven years.’

The community learning disability nurse is vice-secretary of the staff side executive at Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. She is entitled to one day a week for union business. She says the trust and unions have a facilities agreement to cover all aspects of employment relations, which includes providing facilities and time off for union representatives. However, not all stewards have managers who permit the time they need for union work. Ms Bartlam’s employer encourages stewards prevented from doing their work to take the issue to the human resources department, she says.

The staff side executive of union representatives meets managers informally every two to three weeks to discuss issues such as workforce development and policy changes. There is also a formal bi-monthly meeting with senior management.

‘Union stewards can resolve any issues they have privately in the run up to these meetings. We are on the same page as much as possible before the formal trust meeting of all staff,’ says Ms Bartlam.

‘A number of trusts have negotiated pay protection policies. At our trust, the unions negotiated with management that if someone is downbanded from, for example, band 7 to 6, they remain on the same salary. If another band 7 job becomes available they are given the opportunity to apply for it.’

She says that it can be satisfying for stewards if a compromise can be reached with employers over disciplinary cases, such as professional misconduct. ‘Providing there are no overriding factors such as safety risks to patients, it is a

The union steward role

- Preparing and presenting cases on behalf of members.
- Supporting, advising and representing members.
- Contributing to the prevention and resolution of workplace disputes.
- Establishing and improving partnership arrangements with employers, bringing a positive influence to employment relations.

Raising concerns The NHS Scotland Confidential Alert Line for NHS employees who wish to raise concerns about practices in NHS Scotland is to be extended for another two years. In the first 11 months, 159 NHS Scotland employees contacted the helpline. Six of these cases were referred to Healthcare Improvement Scotland for further investigation, while the others were advised on further action. The initial contract is run by Public Concern at Work. The new contract includes a number of improvements and will be tendered. The Alert Line can be contacted on 0800 008 6112. tinyurl.com/Scotstaffalert

Nursing & Midwifery Council Remediation The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is consulting on draft guidance for fitness to practise panel members on the insight, remediation and risk of recurrence displayed by registrants subject to fitness to practise proceedings. The aim of the guidance is to help those involved in the fitness to practise process judge whether the registrant has addressed concerns raised about them. The guidance also aims to help the NMC adopt a fair and proportionate approach to fitness to practise investigations, and ensure that cases are closed at the appropriate stage. The draft guidance is at tinyurl.com/NMC-remediation and the consultation can be found at www.surveymonkey.com/s/DB6HXGR. Responses must be received by noon on May 19.

Revalidation and appraisal A conference on the development of revalidation and appraisal to support...
chance to find a positive solution forward for all parties.

‘Through partnership working, unions are given the heads-up about upcoming changes or new policies and we put our views. It is trying to get things done together, rather than having something done to you.’

Making change

‘Staff may ask why we have not stopped a certain policy from being signed off, but they do not realise how much work we actually do.’

The trust’s head of human resources Chris Sheldon gives the employer’s point of view and says: ‘We have good working relationships. We meet informally to discuss any new or ongoing issues and seek to engage staff side at the earliest opportunity, which can be challenging when the pace of change is so quick.

‘While we know we will not agree on all matters, we believe we can reach resolution more quickly when we have a strong partnership based on mutual respect.’

Petra Kendall-Raynor is a freelance journalist

RESOURCES

Making the case for facilities agreements and facility time: tinyurl.com/RCNFAT

ACAS: Time off for trade union duties and activities: tinyurl.com/ACASTOUDS

Jane Redfern Jones says that being a copycat can pay off

Cherry-pick the best bits

The athlete Kriss Akabusi once said that if someone was good at something you wanted to be good at, you should look ‘into’ them rather than ‘up to’ them.

He suggested that we should study how they do what it is they do in fine detail. Look at their preparation, delivery, stance, voice, gesture, thoughts and behaviours, and so on.

We should then model these and make them our own.

You can improve your career in much the same way, by soaking up ideas like a sponge and adapting them to suit your purposes. You might copy the study path of someone you admire, or a creative idea, or even just a friendly greeting that puts patients at ease.

Find out who is the best at doing what you want to do better and study them. Ask if you can meet them and ask them about their career path. Learn from nurses with a more organised way of working. Or if a colleague has a creative approach to work that you admire, adapt it to your own.

The best copycats don’t just imitate, they pay attention to everything around them, spot the best ideas, then look for ways of integrating them in their practice. To do this you need to develop mindfulness – the notion of being present in the moment, which means remaining alert to where you are, what is happening and your place in it.

Do not confine yourself to your working area. Smart people can learn from excellence wherever they find it. For example, think of the ‘meet and greet’ people in larger stores forging links with customers. Is this something you can adapt as you meet patients entering your clinic or ward?

Cultivate professional relationships with people who will help you develop and grow. If you spend time with people who are successful, perhaps doing a role that you would like to do, then your chances of achieving the same success increase dramatically.

Pick colleagues’ brains for ideas. Read as much as you can and stay informed about nursing by reading journals.

Jane Redfern Jones is a nurse and writer

RESOURCES

RCN Management and Leadership Forum tinyurl.com/RCNMandLF

More about mindfulness http://bemindful.co.uk

Research award

The Nursing Children and Young People journal is offering a research award to support successful applicants to present a child health related project at an RCN affiliated conference. Supported by the RCN Research in Child Health Community (RiCH), two awards of £750 each will be awarded; one to a registered nurse and one to a nursing student or a newly qualified nurse. The closing date for applications is 4pm on December 1 and application details can be obtained from helen.hyland@rcnpublishing.co.uk

Research proposals

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Services and Delivery Research programme is calling for proposals to research the workforce implications of moving care out of hospital. NIHR says little attention has been given to organisational and employment models and ways of working in this scenario. The first stage of the two-part application process asks for outline submissions by 1pm on May 15, with shortlisted proposals to be delivered in full in July.

tinyurl.com/NIHRCOH

NURSING STANDARD