A trust has devised a chief nurse fellowship to boost the careers of talented staff

By Lynne Pearce

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Nurse Nur-in Mohammad is one of the first participants in the fellowship programme at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Working as a theatre nurse but wanting to do something different, Ms Mohammad spotted an internal ad for the fellowship programme. ‘It’s developed skills in me that I thought I wouldn’t be able to do,’ says Ms Mohammad, pictured below. ‘Something might be outside your comfort zone, but once you start doing it you’ll be surprised.’

That experience began at the outset, when she was asked to pitch a quality improvement project to the panel after being shortlisted. ‘It wasn’t something I’d expected, but I came up with an idea and presented it,’ says Ms Mohammad.

Her idea won her a place in the fellowship’s first cohort, alongside two other adult nursing colleagues. They are due to complete the programme in December.

Ms Mohammad describes herself as a poor communicator, but the course has helped her overcome her natural shyness when speaking publicly and chairing meetings. ‘I’m quite an introverted person, so I’m not good at making friends or taking the initiative.’

Developing new skills
Ms Mohammad took up a post as a professional education practitioner at the trust in November. ‘Without the fellowship, I don’t think I’d have had the confidence to apply for the role,’ she says.

Over the course of the programme she has been able to pursue her quality improvement project, which involves reducing surgical site infections (SSIs) by warming patients before they go to theatre, helping to reduce risks.

‘That’s a challenge for the wards,’ Ms Gibson-Wain says. ‘There’s a downside. But would we change it? No. It’s worth it because those people doing the programme are fabulous.’

Strong retention programme
The programme is now into its second cohort. It is advertised externally but all the places so far have been filled by applicants who were already working at the trust. ‘But two people have told us they came here because of the fellowship, applying as soon as we advertised. It does work as an attraction,’ says Ms Gibson-Wain.

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Dee Gibson-Wain, pictured left, Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust associate director for education and development

‘If it wasn’t for the fellowship I wouldn’t be able to do this,’ she says. ‘After you’re qualified, you can feel a bit stuck wondering what’s next, but my advice is go out there and ask what you can do to improve yourself. Nursing is dynamic and we never stop learning.’

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Over the course of the programme she has been able to pursue her quality improvement project, which involves reducing surgical site infections (SSIs) by warming patients before they go to theatre, helping to reduce risks.

This challenged her to use new skills. ‘I needed stakeholders to become involved, so I had to get in touch with people I barely knew. Many are in high managerial positions and as a band 5 nurse, I’d never encountered them before.’

Her initiative, which will continue after she graduates, hopefully becoming part of a trust-wide policy, also won an award from OneTogether, a partnership of organisations with an interest in the prevention of SSIs, which was presented in November.

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October 2017. He was inspired by what he’d heard about a similar concept developed by Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.

‘We assumed it would attract people into clinical specialties that are harder to fill, such as elderly care,’ says Mr Hams.

‘In reality that didn’t happen. But now we see it as a retention programme, which has gone from strength to strength.’

Fresh insights
Mr Hams takes part in the programme’s learning sets and career development. Participants can also shadow him.

‘People bring different perspectives. Sometimes asking what they think may seem like a silly question, but there is no such thing,’ says Mr Hams.

One of the fellows worked with him to recruit a senior nurse.

‘Her insights were incredible. It gave a totally different perspective from the point of view of what it would feel like, as a band 5 nurse, to be managed by this person.’

Among the aspects that set this programme apart is the leadership diploma, delivered by external organisation the Institute of Leadership and Management, which provides academic credits.

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Steve Hams, chief nurse, pictured

‘As a new chief nurse, I recognised there had been a number of years when the organisation hadn’t developed nursing leaders,’ says Mr Hams.

‘It meant that when posts were becoming available, they weren’t going to internal candidates because they weren’t ready. I wanted to develop a legacy.’

Crucially, he believes, the fellowship has encouraged aspiration. ‘In nursing, I think there can be a sense of embarrassment about being ambitious for your career,’ says Mr Hams. ‘But nurses who are ambitious for themselves will be ambitious for their patients.’

‘We need to develop professional pride and a professional voice within the organisation that clearly articulates the contribution that nurses, midwives and allied healthcare professionals bring to great quality care.’

Lynne Pearce is a health journalist

Find out more
Chief nurse fellowship (NHS Improvement)
tinyurl.com/Glouc-fellowship
OneTogether
onetogther.org.uk
Gloucestershire Hospitals staff transition and support network for newly qualified professionals (GloStars)
tinyurl.com/GloStars

‘This is equipping me to go for that next step’

Although she is still in the early stages of her nursing career, the fellowship programme has inspired Charlotte Jakab-Hall to aim high.

‘I feel I could become more senior or a leader of some kind, and this is equipping me to go for that next step,’ says Ms Jakab-Hall, who qualified in January 2018 and is now working in the emergency department. ‘I aspire to be the best leader in nursing I can be, to influence.’

She joined the fellowship’s second cohort in June as one of 11 staff who include midwives and allied healthcare professionals. ‘The programme is what’s kept me in the trust,’ she says. ‘I’m getting an accelerated opportunity to develop my leadership skills.’

‘Learning more about management has been key to her experience so far. ‘I feel we covered leadership well at university and I felt ready for that aspect – for me you’re a leader from the moment you become a student nurse,’ she says. ‘But I didn’t know about management, including managing people. This is giving me that exposure, and it’s a turning point in my capability.’

Another pivotal moment was shadowing deputy chief nursing officer for England Mark Radford for a day in October, at her request. ‘It was a priceless and insightful experience,’ says Ms Jakab-Hall. ‘I thought I knew a lot about what the role entailed, but a lived experience is totally different.’

Before joining the programme she worked with a colleague to set up Gloucestershire Hospitals staff transition and support network for newly qualified professionals, known as GloStars.

‘After preceptorship we felt something was missing and staff needed a bit extra, so we worked closely with the education team to build it,’ says Ms Jakab-Hall. ‘It’s there to promote staying and flourishing within the trust.’

They hope to use it as the basis for a research project, with backing from the fellowship programme.

‘I’m a very motivated and driven person and I want to try to make things the best they can be,’ she says.