

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust wins a Recognition Award through its commitment to employee health and wellbeing by offering £1 per month on-site gym access

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has demonstrated a commitment to staff wellbeing through its innovative Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A core aspect of this is the emphasis on physical activity, acknowledging research that highlights physically active workers take 27% fewer sick days. To support this, the Trust has repurposed spaces within its hospital estate into modern gym facilities branded as 'Wor Gyms'. These facilities, offering state-of-the-art equipment and a range of fitness classes, are available to staff for a nominal fee of £1 per month, ensuring affordability and accessibility for employees. The initiative is inclusive, designed with input from staff network groups to accommodate disability and diversity, and is accessible 24/7 to suit all shift patterns.

Collaborative approach

The Northumbria Safe, Fit, and Well project was developed collaboratively by the wellbeing team and the Staff Physiotherapy service to support staff with musculoskeletal (MSK) concerns using physical activity. This collaboration extended to include occupational health and staff psychology services to address broader health conditions, including mental health. Additional partnerships were formed with the dietetics team to offer nutritional guidance and with Tyneside and Northumberland Mind for workshops on managing stress and improving sleep. This integrated approach has ensured that the programme meets the diverse needs of staff and leverages expertise from multiple specialties.

Challenges and solutions

One of the primary challenges faced by the initiative was the geographical spread of the Trust's services across Northumberland and North Tyneside, making it difficult to provide access to all staff. The phased development of gym facilities meant that initially, only staff at certain locations could participate in the pilot programme. To address this, investment was made to upgrade existing physiotherapy facilities, improving access and security, which allowed for an interim expansion. Additionally, to maintain the quality of the service as it grew, budget allocations were made for the professional development of staff, ensuring they were adequately trained to support the programme's ongoing aims.

Outcomes and improvements

Since the launch of the gym membership in April 2022, over 2,700 staff members (25% of the workforce) have signed up, with over 450 staff visiting the gyms each month. The programme has facilitated over 150 one-on-one personal training sessions, in addition to numerous inductions, programme reviews and participation in both face-to-face and virtual classes. The availability of these facilities has allowed the staff physiotherapy team to redirect their focus from exercise classes to more targeted rehabilitation efforts, saving significant time and resources. The use of outcome questionnaires has shown substantial improvements in both physical and mental wellbeing among staff participants.

Success stories

The wellbeing team, in collaboration with the staff experience team, has shared success stories across various platforms to highlight the benefits of the Safe, Fit, & Well programme. One participant, Gail, a Clinical Research Practitioner, reported significant improvements in her physical health and overall fitness, which she attributes to the programme. Another participant, referred by occupational health, experienced a transformation in both their physical health and personal life, noting improved self-esteem and strengthened relationships as a result of the programme.

“The Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service is fully committed to supporting the wellbeing of our colleagues. This is demonstrated through the team’s innovative ways of working and embedded in various strategies that outline clear and progressive plans to improve physical and mental wellbeing across the organisation. We are always open to feedback and will continue working hard to enhance the wellbeing of our people.”

Nicole Contogiorgi, Head of Occupational Health and Wellbeing Services,
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