

University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust win a Recognition Award for their Grow and Enhance Occupational Health Initiative

In 2022, University Hospitals Dorset (UHD) NHS Foundation Trust embarked on a strategic initiative to grow and enhance its Occupational Health (OH) services. With the endorsement of the Executive Team, a comprehensive business plan was launched, including significant investment in staffing and a five-year development plan. The initiative aimed to build a robust OH service that delivers exceptional care and support to staff, aligning with the Trust's broader objectives of improving employee health and wellbeing.

Strategic staffing and development

A key component of the initiative was the expansion and development of the OH workforce. The Trust increased staffing resources by recruiting skilled professionals and implementing continuous staff development programmes to enhance expertise. This included developing experienced practitioners into leadership roles and creating two OH Nurse development posts funded to complete degree-level OH courses, enabling progression from Band 5 to Band 6 Specialist Nurse which has created clear career pathways and fostered a culture of growth and retention.

Improving productivity and awareness

Productivity within the OH service has been enhanced through the implementation of efficient workflows and the creation of a supportive work environment that encourages resilience and growth. To raise awareness of the OH services, UHD improved its intranet presence, streamlined information sharing, provided training, and engaged more actively with its employee community. Collaboration with the communications team was pivotal in this effort, increasing digital visibility and promoting OH as a viable career path.

The service's reputation has improved significantly through high-quality care delivery and transparent communication with service users and stakeholders. Regular performance monitoring against set, measurable goals aligned with Trust objectives has allowed the team to identify areas for improvement and celebrate successes.

Collaboration and community engagement

Collaboration has been a cornerstone of the initiative, driving the enhancement of OH services and their visibility. By participating in recruitment open days and health and wellbeing activities the OH team has broadened its outreach, supporting recruitment and showcasing the diverse nature of OH services. Additionally, the team plays a key role in the Trust's Managing Attendance training, providing guidance on OH referral processes and strategies for managing health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Training and development

UHD has invested in the professional growth of its OH team through a multifaceted approach, including in-house training programmes tailored to specific job activities

and roles, and continuous mentorship and support for the clinical team. This investment in training has equipped team members with the skills needed to operate autonomously, strengthening service delivery and enhancing staff confidence.

Significant improvement and impact

The Grow and Enhance OH initiative has led to significant improvements across several areas including operational efficiency, service delivery and staff engagement and retention. By showcasing success stories, patient testimonials, and achievements, the OH service has also built trust and credibility, showcasing the quality and impact of its offerings and building its profile and reputation.

Feedback from service users includes comments such as *“communication is excellent”* and *“I felt like the appointment was specific to me. I felt like I mattered and that the plan moving forward was individualised.”*

Tina Ricketts, Chief People Officer at UHD, also expressed her pride in the team’s achievements:

“As Chief People Officer, I am really proud of the way the OH team have developed their services for the benefit of colleagues across the Trust. The changes have made the services more accessible and we are seeing improvement in the wellbeing of our workforce as a result. Waiting times have much improved and we consistently receive good feedback on the quality of the service provided.”

This initiative exemplifies how strategic planning, investment in staff development, and a commitment to collaboration can drive significant improvements in OH services. By prioritising the growth and enhancement of its OH team, UHD has not only strengthened its current operations but also ensured an adaptable and agile service that will continue to meet the needs of its workforce.