



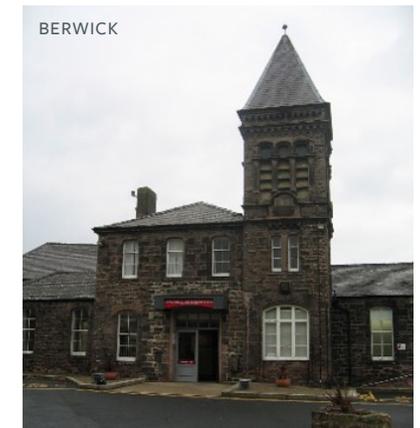
Case Study

Hearing Staff Voices

Understanding, and meeting, the needs of all staff during the pandemic – ‘Corona Voice’ Northumbria

Annaluisa Wood, Matron of Alnwick and Berwick Community Hospitals shared the innovative way staff needs in community hospitals and the wider Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust had been met during the pandemic.

This initiative was led by their Chief Experience Officer Annie Laverty and that the work was independently evaluated by Dr. Win Tadd at Cardiff University. In addition, to Annaluisa’s community hospitals there are a further 5 community hospitals/intermediate care sites (Blythe, Haltwhistle, Morpeth, North Tyneside Intermediate Care Unit and Rothbury) which are part of services that the Trust provides to support more than 500,000 people living in Northumberland and North Tyneside.



Context

The Trust had already taken important steps to invest in the health and wellbeing with an integrated staff experience programme in 2018 before the pandemic. This case study reflects on the additional actions taken during the Covid-19 crisis, the learning and its impact.

What we did

As the pandemic started, the Trust was determined to provide staff with a safe and effective way to raise issues, voice concerns, provide information or just share how they were feeling at the time. With funding from the Health Foundation, and working in partnership with the technology team at Open Lab (Newcastle University), Northumbria quickly altered their standard measurement programme, to include a series of very short, Covid specific, staff surveys, to be presented each week to gain a better understanding of staff well-being across the Trust.

‘Corona Voice’ – a web-based platform was launched on April 6th 2020 as the country went into lock down. In the first three months, it exceeded all expectations, and received 10,400 responses from staff which included their 7 community hospitals/intermediate care units – a fantastic depository of the ongoing reflections of NHS staff during this extraordinary time.



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Staff motivation was tracked on a weekly basis, with the Trust able to quickly identify which hospital sites or groups needed more support. Each week, about a third of all responders chose to leave additional information and free text comments – these were formally analysed, with key themes disseminated across the executive team.

Staff felt that the survey had given them the opportunity to reflect not only on their own feelings and emotional state over time as the pandemic played out, but also on some of the devastating effects of the virus and how colleagues had rallied to support them in the worst of times.

“ Everyone had the opportunity to feed into our exec teams. Every matron and team manager had that feedback from their teams.

ANNALUISA WOOD, MATRON OF ALNWICK AND BERWICK COMMUNITY HOSPITALS



Outcomes/benefits

7 core needs of staff emerged in the free text comments, which are summarised as follows:

1 Listen to me

The weekly surveys gave individuals a voice – an opportunity to reflect upon and express their emotions. Not only did this make staff feel valued, but it also helped them to ventilate negative feelings and reduce stress. Some felt it reflected positively on the Trust as it demonstrated an interest in hearing staff views.

2 Care about me

Very early in the process, Northumbria chose to address some of the fundamental needs of staff, by providing their workforce with free food, free parking and hotel accommodation should it be necessary to stay away from home. Other small gestures that reflected this need were recounted such as free milk so staff didn't have to worry about shopping after long shifts.

3 Keep me safe

Many responses emphasised the efforts the Trust had gone to, to ensure both staff and patients were kept as safe as possible during the pandemic. The provision of hand washing stations at the entrance of Northumbria hospitals including the community hospitals.





There were also weekly videos and question and answer sessions with the Infection Control lead, and effective signage to direct people around buildings with social distancing, helped staff to feel safer at work. Many had greatly appreciated the fact that when government supplies of protective equipment were limited, the Trust had brought on stream its own factory to manufacture these vital supplies locally.

MATRON ANNALUISA EXPLAINED THAT ALNWICK HAD OUTSIDE FACILITIES FOR WASHING HANDS INSTALLED.

“ In Berwick, we had some stainless steel sinks from the theatres which we re-used. The Estates team put up a wet wall and installed the sinks, all within 24 hours.

4 Keep me connected

Staff found comfort in the open, honest and frequent communication that was prioritised by the Trust, through daily briefings and weekly Chief Executive check-ins.

5 Lead me

Leadership was identified as a very influential factor in determining staff wellbeing and experience. The accessibility of senior leaders was also praised and the difficult circumstances in which the Trust were operating was clearly recognised. The response by Trust leaders was seen, by most, as proactive and forward-thinking and this had both inspired staff and engendered a sense of pride.

6 Keep me going

Being a considerate employer was seen as an important means to value all staff. Flexible approaches to childcare and work-life balance, together with recognising the need to readjust and overcome fatigue, checking-up on staff well-being, especially those who had been redeployed and had faced the difficulty of fitting-in with a new team. Key actions of the health and well-being team were frequently recognised as playing an important part in sustaining staff.

7 Notice me – honour my work

The Trust recognised that staff wanted to know that, whatever their role, their contribution at a time of crisis, mattered, and was valued. An appreciative element was built into the weekly Corona Voice surveys which enabled staff to name individuals or teams that they had noticed making a difference. Hundreds of nominations were received each week.



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A well-being website and staff support line rapidly established to offer advice and signpost on a breadth of things including issues such as talking to children about testing etc. Visited by 3500 staff.

Daily wellbeing messages in the Coronavirus briefing to all staff tailored around messages emerging in the feedback. Clarity about childcare provision, access to free meals, IPC queries.

Chill out zones, a going home checklist, safe guarding advice and how and where to access emotional health and support, as staff began to report areas of concern.

A team leaders pack, was developed to provide useful information and practical tips to managers and team leaders to help them support their teams during the pandemic.

Increasing contact for those shielding or not at work via weekly wellbeing calls and letters from the organisation – with 1300 calls made.

Free TV and unlimited calls home for patients who were separated from loved ones, as well as a family support line to share messages of encouragement from home.



Learning and sustainability



TOP TIPS FOR OTHERS

- Senior support and endorsement of this work is essential – one of the reasons that Northumbria has been able to respond so effectively and compassionately to staff concerns during COVID was because our staff experience and well-being programme were both already well established – we were able to rely on high levels of staff engagement, because we already had their trust.
- Having timely access to real time measurement is crucial to ensure a responsive and needs-led approach. There was also a willingness to be agile and flex, according to emerging needs, which ensured timely access to the specific and changing needs of the workforce.
- Covid 19 rapidly brought colleagues together from lots of different disciplines with a shared commitment to respond to the health and well-being needs of our teams. (Public Health, Staff Psychology, Psychiatry, HR, Staff experience, Communications and our Charity) High levels of cooperation and collaboration were essential enablers.
- Create your virtuous circle: providing regular feedback to staff about actions taken in response to their feedback helps increase and maintain their engagement.
- Take the time to measure well – support from the Health Foundation has enabled us to pay attention to stories and data – we needed both to improve.



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Next steps

The Trust recognises that they still have much to learn about the longer-term, mental health implications for patients, staff and our communities. The pandemic has, rightly, elevated staff well-being in NHS organisations, and Northumbria want to hold on to the importance of this work, and the strength of staff feedback.

Contributors

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