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BRIEFING

USING ROTATIONAL POSTS

Why develop and implement rotational posts?

Attracting and retaining staff can be challenging. In response, workforce planners need to be innovative with strategies in order to recruit, develop and retain staff.

An effective way this can be done is by moving substantive staff between two or more posts in a planned way over a fixed period of time, for example, offering a post in one department for six months, and then a post in another department for a further six months.


Rotational posts can be offered across organisations, or a range of organisations such as in a sustainability and transformation partnership (STP). This is a way to strengthen the employment offer to new and existing employees, share learning across departments and help staff to upskill and gain knowledge they otherwise would not have.

How are employers using rotational posts?

As a great attraction and recruitment tool

Providing opportunities for employees to rotate across a number of settings can be an excellent way to attract potential staff to your organisation. It offers employers the opportunity to promote hard to fill posts or posts based in difficult to reach locations in an attractive way.

Rotating staff into different departments or organisations can also help to attract younger people coming into the workforce. Forbes suggests that 16-24 year olds will have at least five careers within their lifetime, therefore rotational posts can be an excellent tool for recruiting this age group, and provide them with the opportunity to see a range of posts and specialties available in the NHS.



Case study: rotational posts to attract and develop new starters

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust launched a rotational pilot for newly qualified nurses and existing band 5 nurses in October 2015. A pilot began with eight candidates rotating in three areas: a medical rotation, a medical admissions rotation and a surgical rotation.


Over the last two years the number of rotational positions has grown with the trust now offering 16 different rotation settings across 31 clinical areas and employing 67 members of staff who rotate around these areas. The trust has recruited a further 27 members of staff to rotate across different departments starting in 2018.

All of the rotations are 18 months in length, and the trust is now looking to explore one and two-year rotations. It has seen many benefits to offering staff rotations in different settings and has received significant positive feedback, particularly around learning and development. A member of staff said “I am happy to go and help on wards that are short staffed,” while another commented “I feel confident in the skills and knowledge I have developed.”

To improve staff retention

Rotational posts are a good way to improve retention of both newly qualified and established staff. For example, where the turnover for newly qualified nurses is very high, rotational posts have helped organisations support, develop and retain them. If established staff are looking to move posts or explore different specialty areas, setting up rotations can offer the opportunity for these members of staff to find out more about the different areas, therefore helping to retain them within your organisation.

Case study: developing and retaining bands 3-8a through rotational posts



At one mental health trust, it is now common practice for senior managers in the forensic unit to identify staff within their teams who would like to rotate around the low, medium and high security wards. Staff within the forensics unit have come to expect rotations as part of their development, from which they will gain experience across the service. Upon completion of rotations, staff members will usually be ready to apply for posts at the next band up and rotations continue again at that level. These rotations take place until band 7 (ward manager level) and at times band 8a team leaders. Managers found that streamlining the process and paperwork has helped to easily rotate staff around the unit. On top of this, learning from each ward has been shared by the staff on rotation, supporting continuing professional development (CPD).

To support staff development

At five recent Nursing Times Careers Live events, 526 nurses in training and registered nurses told us that their top priority when looking for a job is the opportunity for development. Offering a post which rotates around different areas can support you with meeting the development needs of your workforce, and broaden their skill sets, confidence and knowledge to provide better patient care and meet future service need. Rotating staff across departments can also help your workforce to develop and maintain competencies.

Rotational posts can help develop staff, especially those making the transition from being a student to becoming a registered professional. Alongside preceptorship, these posts can help staff discover the area they want to work in and gain useful experience from a range of specialities.

Case study: developing skills to provide exceptional patient care


Rotating physiotherapists and occupational therapists across different departments has become part of the attraction and development offer at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

Rotational posts are well established within the trust and therapists have gained a greater understand of how different departments within the trust operate, as well as having developed a greater variety of clinical skills and competencies for providing better patient care. This has enabled them to treat patients holistically, treating the functional problem the patient presents with and not just the condition they are diagnosed with. Rotation also supports retention of highly motivated staff and skilled staff who want to remain working for the trust.

Case study: collaboration across regions

In Nottinghamshire, four healthcare organisations are working together to provide 16 posts for newly qualified and existing nurses to rotate across. The organisations involved are Nottingham City Care Partnerships, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The collaboration between organisations has been met with enthusiasm from all involved. The trusts aim to make the rotation work and ensure it fits the purpose and benefits both staff and patients.



A rotational development lead nurse is one of the key enablers to the success of staff working across different organisations as they have a focus on:


- what is needed by each trust to provide a post
- provide a clear thread of engagement across the organisations
- hold others to action in a non-biased way.

There is no affiliation to any one organisation, resulting in equitability, shared support and commitment to supporting the teams and the rotational nurses.

To help with recruitment, the rotational development lead nurse was provided with access to recruitment platforms at each of the trusts to enable shortlisting. The HR team at Nottingham Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust agreed to complete pre-employment checks for all interviewees.

Before starting the rotational posts both the rotational nurses and the managers supporting them are asked to complete a questionnaire to support with learning. Further questionnaires are sent out at six month intervals.

Communication and monthly steering group meetings have been an essential aspect of the process, resulting in more collaborative working across organisations, sharing ideas and processes around the recruitment and retention of staff. There continues to be interest in rotational posts both from student nurses due to qualify and experienced nurses relocating to the area.



One rotational nurse reported that she has been well received within the community team that she has spent a rotation with and has learned new ways of working and clinical skills. As she now rotates into another organisation she is excited to see how she can use her experiences so far to positively influence patient care and is keen to continue her links with her colleagues within the community.

As a way of building an innovative culture and making staff feel valued

Rotational posts can encourage a culture of organisational challenge, learning and improvement, both for individuals and the departments and organisations that support rotations, as each team member involved looks at ways they can continue to improve the environment in which they work. Engaging staff to develop rotational posts and act on their feedback can also encourage buy in from staff to support and promote the benefits these posts have to offer. Providing education and training opportunities such as rotational posts, is also another way of making staff feel valued, supported and professionally fulfilled.

Case study: engaging staff in the development of rotational posts

NHS trusts within Gloucestershire STP have formed a focus group of nursing associates to determine how staff feel about rotations across different settings within the STP and how their experiences can improve staff engagement around STP developments. They are also gathering feedback on how they can make rotational posts work for others including allied health professionals and nurses, and other hard to recruit posts. The STP is working with the local university to implement rotational posts and support staff development and retention strategies.

How can I develop and implement rotational posts in my organisation?

- Share this briefing with your operational managers.
- Identify champions in teams or departments who would like to host a rotational post.
- Establish a working group of these champions to build an implementation plan to take this forward.

Further information

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