Is innovative workforce planning software the solution to the NHS cost and staffing crisis? An exploration of the locum industry

Iakovos Theodoulou, Akshaya Reddy, Jeremy Wong and Natalia Jankowska

BACKGROUND

Workforce planning in the NHS is associated with significant costs of agency staff employment. The introduction of Locum’s Nest (LN) as an innovative platform for locum recruitment offers a potential solution to this problem. This study aims to qualitatively evaluate its introduction at Delta Hospital, the first pilot site. Whilst there is a substantial body of literature on innovations in healthcare, the literature on locum doctors is fragmented and has yet to provide a coherent understanding of the issues surrounding their employment.

METHODOLOGY

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted across five informant groups: two industry experts, two healthcare consultants, an executive director, two specialty managers and six locum doctors. These were supplemented by documentary analysis of board minutes and CQC reports.

RESULTS

We found that locum doctors are indispensable to covering workforce shortages, yet job satisfaction is highly variable. Existing planning and recruitment practices were found to be inefficient, bureaucratic and lacking transparency. Contrarily, digital solutions like LN seem to secure higher convenience, better transparency, cost and time efficiency. We also found that the successful adoption of LN at Royal Surrey was due to features such as trialability, observability, compatibility and the scope for local reinvention.

CONCLUSION

An information exchange system (IES) model (Figure 1) was proposed which may form the basis of evaluation of workforce recruitment strategies like LN. This model was used to evaluate ABG against other recruitment methods and LN was found to outperform its alternatives, thus proving its potential to solve the staffing and cost crisis at DH.
Figure 1: "Information Exchange System" Model