Establishing an open culture of engagement and collaboration to enable staff to drive change

Helping NHS organisations and staff across the UK to work better together and using staff to their full potential can increase productivity and reduce costs, while improving staff satisfaction and patient experience (case study 8). Our interviewees recognised the importance of leadership (at all levels of the organisation) for promoting a culture of transparency, communication and openness, and for learning from other organisations and industries.

Collective quality improvement at trust level

However, faced with increasing pressures, increasingly clinical teams do not have the time nor the skills to design or, more importantly, implement, service and quality improvement projects. Moreover, non-technical skills such as team working, leadership and quality of decision making are hard to assess by peer review and difficult to develop. Our research shows that by applying a structured approach to communication and staff engagement and by training staff in evidence-based quality improvement methodologies, and empowering them to apply these methodologies hospitals can realise significant benefits (case study 9).

New models of cross-organisational and cross sectoral collaboration

With significant system transformation underway across most local health economies in the UK, senior leaders recognise the need to reorganise services collaboratively. However, few report engaging successfully and at scale with other organisations. Technology is helping Trusts to improve recruitment and control agency costs by sharing the regionally-available staff (case study 10).

Case study 10. Collaborating across Trusts to improve bank use: Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (Royal Surrey) and Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

In 2014/15 the Royal Surrey Hospital County Hospital Trust spent £16.8 million on agency staff, struggling to fill vacant shifts with substantive staff. Two clinicians at the Trust developed a novel mobile app for medical bank staff, designed to help the Trust with temporary staffing through the effective deployment of existing staff. Locum’s Nest, was launched in November 2016 to match in-house availability with demand. The app was initially rolled out to the Trust’s General Medicine department, before being implemented across all specialties as well as at the neighbouring Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. In the financial year before the implementation, Ashford and St. Peter’s spent £5.5 million on medical agency staffing.

The app served as an effective tool for senior clinical leadership aiming to drive changes in how vacant shifts were filled. Since May 2017 both Trusts use the app for this pioneering digital medical collaborative bank. Feedback from rota coordinators is positive, with high satisfaction about the usability of the solution, the customer service provided, as well as the impact the increased use of bank staff has for consistency and continuity of care. The medical department at Royal Surrey County Hospital is now consistently matching 90 per cent of shifts locally, an increase from four per cent before implementing the solution. At Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust the app has increased the filling of shifts by bank medical locums from 18 per cent in March 2017 to 87 per cent in December 2017. In the current financial year this has to date allowed for £1.3 million net saving through reducing dependency on agency medical staff.

The 3-way partnership has formed the blueprints for the drive towards a collaborative NHS as locums can book shifts at both Trusts. Locum’s Nest is now in partnership with 7 NHS Trusts across NHS England, 4,800 clinicians are subscribed to the app and over 13,000 shifts have been filled using the app over the last 15 months.