

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust achieves a 2025 Recognition Award for transforming its Occupational Health Service

Recognising the crucial role of occupational health in staff wellbeing and patient safety, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust launched a comprehensive Occupational Health (OH) Transformation Programme between 2023 and 2025. The initiative restructured and revitalised a previously under-resourced, fragmented service into a modern, data-driven, high-performing function.

A service in need of change

Before the pandemic, the Trust's OH service faced significant challenges: chronic understaffing, high agency reliance and inconsistent practices. The pandemic exacerbated these issues, leaving a service struggling with overspend, staff turnover and low morale. Post-pandemic recovery created the opportunity for radical transformation.

A strategic approach

Guided by the principles of NHS England's Growing Occupational Health Together Strategy, Imperial undertook a full review and redesign of the OH service. A business case secured £377,000 investment, enabling a complete restructure. The new model introduced specialist roles, functional experts, clear career pathways and a strengthened digital and data function.

Collaborative working was central to success. The OH team partnered with Finance, Infection Prevention & Control, ICT, HR Divisions and the Integrated Care Board, ensuring the service was fully aligned with organisational needs and national standards. The restructure embedded a new vision, refreshed values and modern systems to support data-led, evidence-based decision-making.

Overcoming challenges

Rebuilding the team during a national workforce shortage required persistence and creativity. Over 70% of the team were new recruits, supported through robust induction, mentoring and coaching. Cultural change was another challenge, shifting from reactive to proactive practice, and from fragmented working to collaborative, accountable delivery. By embedding new standards, improving documentation and using real-time data, Imperial's OH service became both efficient and responsive.

Lasting impact

The results have been transformative.

- **Service KPIs:** A new dashboard provides transparent performance data to HR leaders, showing measurable improvement across all operational areas.
- **Financial stability:** For the first time in seven years, the service achieved budget balance.
- **Permanent workforce:** The reliance on agency and bank staff has been eliminated entirely.

- Customer satisfaction: Complaints have dropped sharply, and feedback from Divisional HR and Infection Prevention & Control teams is overwhelmingly positive.
- Innovation and wellbeing: The strengthened team now leads proactive initiatives, from menopause support and smoking cessation pilots to digital reporting innovations and wellbeing festivals.

The service has retained SEQOHS accreditation, with assessors commending it as “a class-leading occupational health service” that is “making a huge difference.”

As Matt Hall, Associate Director of Health and Safety and Work Environment, reflected:

“The restructuring of the Occupational Health team has had a visible impact on staff wellbeing and safety. We’ve moved from a service focused on meeting KPIs to one that actively prevents staff harm and enhances wellbeing.”

Debbie Wheddon, Divisional Director of People, added:

“As a user of the OH service, I’ve seen first-hand the positive impact of the transformation. The expansion of the team clearly reflects the growing demand for high-quality, timely advice that supports both staff and managers in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. The recruitment of highly experienced professionals has significantly enhanced the service’s reputation, enabling faster response times and more consistent support when it’s most needed. This has empowered managers to make more compassionate, informed decisions, and has truly elevated the role of OH within the Trust.”