Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust creates Senior Screening Nurse role to tackle workforce health challenges

Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has taken a positive step in addressing health inequalities among its 4,500-strong workforce. Situated across two sites in Warrington and Runcorn, the Trust serves communities with significantly poor health outcomes. Recognising the importance of supporting staff wellbeing, the Trust's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service developed a dedicated Senior Screening Nurse (SSN) position to enhance its capabilities and reach.

A holistic approach

The SSN role was introduced as part of the Trust's ambition to better meet the health and wellbeing needs of its staff. While the role includes core Occupational Health (OH) functions – such as pre-employment health screening, vaccination clinics, and blood tests – it also champions a more proactive health prevention and wellbeing approach.

Working closely with the Trust's People Directorate and other departments, the SSN takes the lead on delivering bespoke health interventions and awareness campaigns. These initiatives are designed to improve staff engagement, encourage healthier lifestyles, and address preventable health risks. Key activities include:

- **Collaborating with clinical services** to deliver targeted health initiatives, such as Smart Heart events led by Consultant Interventional Cardiologists and cancer awareness programmes.
- **Partnering with local authorities and public health teams** to align with broader health promotion efforts, such as smoking cessation programmes and social prescribing.
- **Engaging with staff networks and cultural teams** to create inclusive campaigns like Men's Health Week and Summer mental health awareness events.

Overcoming engagement challenges

The SSN has faced challenges in reaching staff during periods of intense operational pressure, particularly among clinical teams unable to step away from their duties. To address this, the SSN has adopted a flexible and mobile approach, delivering 'roving' interventions directly in clinical areas to ensure accessibility. This strategy has built trust and demonstrated the OH team's commitment to meeting staff where they are, leading to increased participation in future initiatives.

The role has also prioritised inclusivity by conducting equality impact assessments for all interventions, ensuring that the needs of staff across protected characteristics are considered.

Demonstrating tangible impact

The SSN's interventions have had measurable effects on staff health outcomes and engagement. The Smart Heart campaign, for example, revealed significant health concerns among participating staff:

- 35% were found to have high blood pressure, with referrals made for GP follow-up.
- 11% had undiagnosed atrial fibrillation and received letters for urgent GP consultations.
- 6% enrolled in local smoking cessation programmes.
- One staff member, diagnosed with a previously undetected heart murmur, was referred for an echocardiogram, averting potential cardiac complications.

Vaccination campaigns led by the SSN have also shown impressive results:

- Healthcare worker measles immunity increased by 2.5% to 98.2%.
- Immunity among other workers rose by 9.4%, reaching 93.7%.
- Overall workforce immunity improved by 4.4%, achieving a total rate of 97%.

A lifesaving difference

One significant outcome involved a staff member identified during a Smart Heart event with dangerously high blood pressure. Immediate action led to the individual attending A&E, receiving stabilising medication, and avoiding a high-risk health outcome. As a result, they were able to return to work in a stable and healthier condition.

Providing information, advice and guidance support has been a lifeline for some employees with one recipient saying:

"I feel valued by the organisation as somebody is taking an interest in my health and wellbeing."

Rebecca Patel, Associate Chief People Officer said:

"With responsibility for culture and wellbeing, I see the difference that the investment of this position to focus on health prevention and promotion has achieved within the organisation. The team are able to respond to emerging trends and themes in terms of sickness and be able to work proactively to support our workforce to remain healthy in work."

A model for workforce wellbeing

Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust's introduction of the SSN role exemplifies a proactive approach to workforce health. By addressing health inequalities and promoting preventative care, the Trust has improved staff wellbeing, increased engagement, and demonstrated the value of investing in tailored OH initiatives.