

# CASE STUDY: VALUES BASED COMPETENCY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CLINICAL ROLES



In 2012, The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust rolled out values-based competency interview questions for recruitment to clinical roles. These were developed by the Human Resources (HR) Department, to support recruiting managers and help ensure that new recruits exhibit and share the Trust's five core values; caring, dignity, respect, openness and pride.

These core values were developed by the staff in order to localise the NHS Constitution and provide the guiding principles that underpin everything the Trust does. From these values core behaviours have been developed to bring "The Walton Way" to life and ensure that these values are thoroughly embedded within the organisation and its employees.

By ensuring that new starters are recruited against these values it is hoped that not only will staff be competent in their role but that they will also display these core behaviours in their everyday work, thus improving patient care and feedback and reducing conduct issues.

Between four and five competency style questions were developed for each value. Prompts and scoring guidance were also devised for each question, as well as an additional assessment for communication, assessed throughout the interview, and skills/experience. This was combined with

an overall scoring sheet and clear guidelines regarding interviewing technique, to provide one comprehensive document for use by recruiting managers.

Depending on the role being recruited to, the manager chooses questions from each value, usually one from each value for bands 1 to 4, gradually increasing for higher bands. Question choice can therefore be tailored to suit the needs of the job and the person specification.

The questions are intended for clinical roles between bands 1 and 6, although other non-clinical areas' roles have also used elements, to help ensure that successful candidates truly reflect the Trust's ethos. They have been readily and enthusiastically accepted by managers as an extremely beneficial tool to support recruitment of the right people for the right role.

These values-based interview questions play a key role in supporting the Trust to achieve its strategic objectives and ensure robust recruitment processes which reflect the needs

of the organisation. As well as reflecting the NHS constitution these also fit closely with the recent Francis report which places a huge emphasis on ensuring common values and the demonstration of care, compassion, dignity, openness and transparency.

## Key Outcomes

- Over 60 nurses and 35 healthcare assistants who exemplify the Trust's underpinning values have been successfully recruited, to support the opening of a new ward and rehabilitation unit.
- The interview process for clinical recruitment is now structured and standardised across the Trust.
- New documentation has been readily accepted by ward managers and matrons, who have consistently given positive feedback:
  - *"Wow, having this will make life so much easier for interviews. Thank you"* - Julie McEnerney, Corporate Matron
  - *"I personally found the competency-based questions much better than the old system. The choice of questions was good for each category meaning you could tailor it for each grade and it allowed a more open discussion, especially if a candidate had no previous experience or was a student. It allows people to draw on experience and not tie them down to a specific answer. It allows them to open up if needed and expand on the question"* - Lynn Davies, Ward Manager
  - *"When there have been more than one team carrying out interviews the new style of questioning allows for continuity and makes the process much smoother"* - Clare Moore, Ward Manager
- This documentation has now become fully embedded in the Trust's recruitment process and will continue to be used for both general recruitment and subsequent expansion plans.
- Staff interviewed through this process have reported that they found it positive and professional.
- Although it is still too early to be able to fully review the benefit of this new process on patient care it is hoped that patient satisfaction scores will improve and there will be a notable increase in staff demonstrating these values across the Trust. It is also hoped that through this there will be a reduction in conduct and disciplinary cases.

## Background

The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust, located in Liverpool, is the only specialist neurosciences NHS Trust in the UK and employs approximately 1,150 staff. The Trust's specialist staff offer a world class service in diagnosing and treating injuries and illnesses affecting the brain, spine and peripheral nerves and muscles; and in helping people suffering from long term neurological conditions.

The majority of the Trust's patients come from Merseyside, Cheshire, North Wales, Lancashire and the Isle of Man, but for some specialist treatments of complex disorders patients are referred from all parts of the UK, Eire and further afield.

In 2010 the Trust launched 'The Walton Way' which sets out five key values that underpin and encapsulate the way in which the Trust works. The five Walton Way values are:

- **Caring:** caring enough to put the needs of others first
- **Dignity:** passionate about delivering dignity for all
- **Openness:** open and honest in all we do
- **Pride:** proud to be part of one big team
- **Respect:** courtesy and professionalism - it's all about respect

The Trust has now developed core behaviours in order that 'The Walton Way' can come alive.

An increase over recent years in the number of patients treated and the range of clinical services provided, has put pressure on the Trust's existing facilities, resulting in a major expansion plan. The first part of this was the opening of a new 29 bed ward, a new theatre and a new research centre in 2012/13, as well as involvement in a new rehabilitation network. The expansion is continuing with the remodelling of the current day ward to include more beds and overnight facilities, and finally, the development of a new three-storey building which is due for completion by the end of 2014. These expansions will provide the Trust with the facilities needed to provide more and better care to patients.

## Key Aims

The Walton Centre aims to:

- ensure that staff recruited by the Trust reflect and share its values and behaviours, and thus exemplify these in their everyday work.
- develop a robust and standardised recruitment process to support recruiting managers and ensure a structured and consistent approach, in line with best practice.
- support a major recruitment drive by the Trust in preparation for the opening of a new ward, new theatre and rehabilitation network

## Key Stages of Setup

In 2012 Hannah Sumner, HR Advisor, was assigned as the lead for this project and began to pull together possible questions for each of the Trust's values. These were targeted towards clinical staff and worded so that they were competency-based.

Meetings were then held with each of the Trust's matrons to discuss the proposed questions and gain feedback to suit clinical need. The document was reviewed in light of this feedback and, once a final version was accepted, was launched. Given the nature and aim of the document this was

initially done through a presentation at an Operational Nurse Managers' Board, and then published through Team Brief. However given its confidential nature this was only circulated at ward manager level and above.

For those who would be using the document, training guidance was given, and, following initial use, a couple of amendments were made to fine tune the documentation.

*"This proactive and innovative piece of work has, and continues to, allow us to recruit nurses that hold the Walton Way Values which ensures we consistently deliver excellence in patient care."*

- Lisa Grant, Director of Nursing

## How It Works

Prior to interview the panel select those questions that they wish to ask from each value. The number and choice of questions selected from each value will depend on the level of the post being appointed to. Within each value the questions increase in complexity, to enable managers to choose those which are at the most appropriate level for the post. For bands 1-4 it is advised that approximately one question is selected from each section and for bands 5 and 6 one or two of the more complex questions from each section.

Skills and previous experience should be included as a separate question. Where appropriate, these core value-based questions may also need to be supported with additional clinical-based questions. Communication is also assessed through the interview, and an overall score given.

## Resources

There was no cost associated with the development and design of the values-based competency questions, aside from the dedicated time required to create the document.

## Key Challenges

The main challenge faced was ensuring that managers bought into the new process and used the interview questions when recruiting. This was overcome by firstly involving clinical staff in the review process so that the questions truly reflected the needs of clinical staff, and secondly by launching this at the Trust's Management Board. This was followed up with detailed communication and training for those primarily responsible for clinical recruitment.


## Key Learning

- Traditional interview questions are no longer adequate in the current recruitment environment
- Involvement of key stakeholders is essential in gaining commitment and in embedding new processes

## Next Steps

Given the success of this document the Trust is planning to adapt the questions to provide an additional guide for non-clinical roles and doctors.

Work to develop this is beginning to take shape; with meetings being set up between HR and other the relevant individuals to gain an idea of what the questions need to reflect. It is hoped that these can begin to be rolled out by the end of 2013.



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