



ST HELENS & KNOWSLEY TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS TRUST

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE A HOLISTIC APPROACH

SUMMARY

Following the review of the Occupational Health Service, the HR Advisory Service, the Attendance Management Policy and the role of the line manager in reducing sickness absence the Trust has reduced absence by over 1% in a 12 month period.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Health, Work and Well Being function that is working towards meeting the Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS) standards, and preparing for accreditation
- Reduction in total days lost for both long and short-term absence
- Change in focus from tackling sickness with supporting long term health and wellbeing
- Quicker decision making on long term ill health cases
- More joined up approach across the organisation

KEY AIMS

- To reduce the sickness absence rate to 4% with 2.5% long term, and 1.5% short term
- To improve staff survey results
- Increase productivity
- Deliver a 1% cost improvement through £1 million agency saving

KEY STAGES OF SET-UP

There was an initial timeframe of 4 months from September 2010. During this period HR undertook a comprehensive review of absence management which resulted in a new absence policy and a redesign of management reports, the former involved comprehensive consultation including staff side. Within this Human Resources Business Partners (HRBPs) and managers were consulted regarding their roles, and as result absence triggers were simplified.

There was also an audit of staff trigger levels and management actions around sickness absence, with a consultation directly with managers.

The Occupational Health Service were seen as a key tool in tackling absence rates and the department underwent a total service redesign creating The Health, Work and Wellbeing (HWWB) Department.

An investment business case was developed for non-core services e.g. a physiotherapy Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and psychological interventions.

In addition the Trust has invested in the Robertson Cooper Motivation, Morale & Leadership Styles surveys to identify areas where leadership styles might be having a negative impact on staff wellbeing. A number of departments have commenced the programme in 2011/12, including the Consultant Workforce as part of aligning the wellbeing agenda with the Talent Management & Leadership Development Strategy.

BACKGROUND

St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust is an acute hospital Trust employing around 7,000 staff, which includes 2,500 doctors in training under the Single Lead Employer contract for the Mersey Deanery.

Human Resources and the new Health Work & Well being Service (Occupational Health) are located on the Whiston Hospital site in Prescott, Merseyside.





GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

HOW IT WORKS

The new Attendance Management policy was approved by the Trust Executive in March 2011. The policy was launched with awareness workshops for managers and a new staff leaflet distributed. At this point the policy excluded the Medical & Dental Workforce until further engagement had taken place about how the policy would work in practice for both Trusts Consultants/SAS Grades and the Single Lead Employer workforce. The policy was extended to cover the Medical Workforce in December 2011 with implementation in early 2012. A new Health, Work and Wellbeing Department was launched in January 2011 which included investment in a wide range of extended services to meet SEQOHS, 24/7 Employee Assistance Programme Counselling, Psychology, Fast track physiotherapy, holistic therapies and rapid access triage through a nurse led service.

An Employee Assistance Programme pilot was undertaken with PPC as the provider, offering phone line and website support for staff and their families.

New absence reporting structures were introduced for managers, including performance management, to ensure that managers were aware when an employee triggered the policy and needed to be staged. An automatic letter is generated if a member of staff takes more than 2 instances of sickness absence leave in a 12 month period. There are no exceptions to the new system, unless granted by the Deputy Director of Human Resources.

In addition the Trust is piloting on-line management referral using COHORT. This speeds up referral and reports back to managers. In July 2011 the HWWB service implemented the one way ESR/COHORT interface, with the two-way being developed for piloting by 2012.

SUSTAINABILITY

HRBPs attend a Care group and Corporate Divisional meeting on a monthly basis and work in an integrated way with the HWWB team. HRBPs hold monthly meetings with managers and attend staff meetings. The Director of HR and Deputy meet quarterly with Department Heads to review absence. In addition the Deputy Director of HR attends

a monthly meeting with the Consultant in OH and Head of Health, Work and Wellbeing to review all long term absence cases of 4 months or more to ensure all appropriate steps are being taken to support either an early return to work, or a decision on ill health termination if appropriate, well before sick pay expires. This approach ensures ongoing dialogue between HR, HWWB, the employee and their line manager

The HR council has sickness absence, and wellbeing as standing items for performance reporting. Further to this the Board receives quarterly absence reports.

NEXT STEPS

- Continuing high level oversight of case management.
- Recently pulled a report from ESR identifying long term sickness absences over the last 5 years to identify cases where individuals have had more than one instance of long-term absence and individuals will be contacted for a discussion with HWWB as to why they appear to be having long periods of absence year on year and what can be offered to support an improvement in their well being. The Attendance Management policy now has a stage (warning) with regards underlying medical conditions; this has levels rather than stages and aligns with a capability policy which would enable staff with an underlying medical problem to be terminated due to being unable to attain a satisfactory levels of attendance due to their incapacity, without being in breach of the Equality Act 2010.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Please contact Claire Scrafton directly for access to any of the following

- ▶ Attendance Management Policy
- ▶ Medical Workforce Attendance Management protocols – all grades
- ▶ Health, Work and Wellbeing Service, service specification
- ▶ Absence Tracker template
- ▶ Talent Management & Leadership Development Strategy



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