

MARCH 2016

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

Raising awareness of an ageing workforce

The organisation

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust (DGT) was established in November 1993 and is based in Kent. The trust has 3,000 staff, and serves a community of around 400,000 people. It provides a range of services including surgery, accident and emergency, trauma, orthopedics, cardiology, maternity, pediatrics and general medicine. The trust has increased its staff base by 33 per cent in the last six years as demand for services rise.

Background

Louise Lester, deputy HR director at DGT established a working longer group within the organisation, and worked with a team to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities an ageing workforce may bring.

After the trust's executive team were aware of the national NHS Working Longer Group (WLG) the trust decided to establish its own working longer group in March 2015.

The group made use of products from the WLG to assess what the ageing workforce means for the organisation. Age profiling the workforce highlighted issues that needed to be addressed.

Their age profiling showed that:

- the average age of the workforce is 43
- 40 per cent of the trust's nurses are over 45
- 45 per cent of the trust's workforce over the age of 50 work part time
- the healthcare scientist and A&C workforce have the highest percentages of staff aged 50 and above
- allied healthcare professionals is the staff group with the lowest percentage of workforce working beyond 60 across the trust.

Outputs from the group

In 2015, the group held retirement workshops, which were open to all staff to attend, to help staff to understand their retirement options. The pensions' manager used the [WLG flexible retirement guides](#) to help staff learn about the flexibilities available to members of the NHS Pension Scheme.

Following the pilot session, the trust ran six events across its two sites for approximately 20 attendees per event. Events were over-subscribed, so the trust ran a waiting list. The feedback was positive and showed that the sessions were informative and helpful. Planning is currently underway for a similar series of events in 2016.

To make sure training is available to staff regardless of age, the group assessed learning and development opportunities across the organisation. Positively, the findings show that training is accessed evenly across the age groups within the trust. However, to make sure that different needs and learning styles at different ages are being met, the learning and development team are making changes to appraisal and other training packages to include guidance for managers.

In order to raise awareness of the trust's age demographics, the group used the [WLG infographic](#) and adapted it to highlight the key statistics for the organisation. This has been used as the trust-wide screen saver and displayed in staff areas. It has sparked discussion and debate among staff and management about the issues and opportunities ahead for the trust.

The group included the trust's health and wellbeing strategy within its work, and a running club was established in 2015. The club encourages staff to have a healthy and active lifestyle, and has created a buzz within the trust as fun and sociable, with people often inviting colleagues. They meet every Wednesday and split into two groups; one group follows the couch to 5km programme and the other typically runs further distances. There are approximately 15 regular members of the group including the Chief Executive. Nobody runs alone and key safety messages are delivered ahead of each run. The trust made staff aware of the link to the local working longer group and the health and wellbeing strategy for the trust through their communications. The club was promoted through staff emails and by the monthly trust team brief which is delivered verbally by the chief executive and then filtered through the trust in a written briefing.

In 2015, the trust used the staff friends and family test to focus additional questions to staff on health and wellbeing. The results led to an investment in new equipment for the onsite gym at Darent Valley Hospital, which is available to all staff for a nominal fee. The intention with the new equipment was to ensure that all staff, regardless of age, have access to exercise facilities. Helping staff to remain healthier for longer will help ensure the ageing workforce can continue to provide safe and effective care.

Next steps

The group met in January 2016 to look at the resources available in the WLG [age awareness toolkit](#). The group found the toolkit easy to navigate and comprehensive. They identified a number of key priorities, which the toolkit will help them take forward.

- Assess organisational readiness using the WLG [tool](#). Departmental leads will complete relevant sections of the assessment. The learning and development and occupational health teams will complete the entire assessment for their areas of work
- Use the WLG template [senior management slides](#) to create a trust specific presentation for managers to present at regular meetings and established networks. In order to gain feedback from staff, key questions will be included at the end of the presentation and managers will feed these back to the group.

The trust will run a short staff survey in early 2016 to find out what they think and feel about working longer and an ageing workforce. The questionnaire will focus on what concerns staff may have and what support they feel they would benefit from. The results will help inform the priorities and work programme for the group going forward.

The trust has already looked at the age profiling of the organisation as a whole. It now plans to integrate age profiling into the bi-monthly workforce committee meetings, with directorate business partners reporting on age profile, along with other workforce metrics through an established reporting template. The group hopes to include age related workforce data as part of business as usual for the trust. With the current round of business planning for the year ahead, it is hoped directorates will be able to see the benefit of age profiling data and how it can assist with workforce and succession planning. The trust will investigate ways it can become more age diverse and promote its profile as an age friendly employer within the local community.

Tips for other trusts

- Raise the awareness of an ageing workforce sooner rather than later. It's important to highlight implications and challenges for staff and organisations is a long term project.
- Remember, culture change within an organisation takes time.
- Having the right mix of representatives and partnership working on a local level is essential to representing the entire workforce; don't forget to include representatives for volunteers, and partner organisations (long term contractors) that contribute a significant amount to trust working life.
- Undertake age profiling for the workforce.
- Small things can make a difference (such as the running club).
- Infographics are a good way to present statistical information about the age profile of the workforce.



Further information

To find out more about the work of the local group, please contact Louise Lester, deputy HR director on louise.lester1@nhs.net.

For further information on the WLG, please visit our [web pages](#). We have also developed an [age awareness toolkit](#) to help employers work in partnership with trade union colleagues to create organisational awareness of the opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing workforce. This includes suggested engagement approaches that you could use in your trust.

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