'Safe Staffing' improvement work is ensuring the safety of patients and colleagues

A huge amount of improvement work on 'Safe Staffing' is currently taking place across UHMBT to protect and support patients and colleagues.

Safe Staffing is central to the Trust's 'Areas of Focus' for 2022/23 which are quality and safety of services, the physical and psychological wellbeing of colleagues, and financial performance and transformation.

Lorna Pritt, Associate Chief Nurse for Corporate Nursing, who is leading the 'Nursing Safe Staffing Work-stream' of the Recovery support Programme (RSP) at UHMBT, said: "The whole aim of having safe, sustainable, and productive staffing is to ensure that there are enough colleagues in every department to keep patients safe.

"We are absolutely committed to keeping our patients and colleagues safe. We need to ensure that our clinical services have the right staff in the right place at the right time to deliver quality patient care, and to maintain patient and staff safety.

"Safe Staffing is so important because if areas are not safely staffed, it can be highly stressful for everyone. We need to get the infrastructure correct to keep everyone safe."

The National Quality Board (NQB) produces guidance called 'Safe, Sustainable and Productive Staffing' which Lorna and the team are following.

NHS England and Improvement visited UHMBT in 2021 to see if the Trust could align itself to the NQB guidance. As a result of this visit, Lorna and the team set about an improvement process with a work plan and workbook to follow the NQB guidance.

Six key areas for the Safe Staffing Work-stream were identified and are listed below:

1. Strategy – how we are going to staff ourselves now and, in the future, and how we are going to make sure that staffing is safe on a day-to-day basis.
2. Establishment Reviews - to ensure that baseline staffing levels are correct.
3. 'Safe Care' – to record our staffing and patient acuity using an electronic system called 'Safe Care' to identify daily staffing needs in inpatient ward areas.
4. Safe Staffing Dashboard – to store up-to-date and accurate data for staff on wards to use. We are working with the I3 Team to create a dashboard so we can gather our data, store it, and share it in a straightforward way that staff can understand. It will enable us to look at trends such as whether things are getting better or worse. We will then take action.
5. Recruitment/retention – an extensive programme to recruit and retain more staff is underway.
6. Procedural documents – keeping them up to date and following them.

Lorna said: "Our 'Establishment Reviews' show us the average needs of the patients on a particular department throughout the time that we collect the data. For inpatient areas, we collect the data for 20 days, twice a year, to understand what the average acuity and dependency needs are, so we can make sure the staffing levels on that ward are normally able support the needs of the patients.

"However, we know there are sometimes spikes in acuity and dependency, and we need to be prepared for that. We must allocate staff to the areas that they are most needed by assessing our staffing needs for each shift and allocating staff accordingly.

"We have worked hard on our Establishment Reviews and have reported our findings to the Trust Board. This process will be completed twice-yearly as a minimum, so that we know that the staffing is checked, up-to-date, and that the baseline is right."

An extensive piece of work is currently taking place on the recruitment and retention of staff. The Safe Staffing team is looking at the following:

- International recruitment – we plan to bring around 155 new international nurses into the Trust in 2022.
- We are training Registered Nurse Degree Apprentices who are paid a wage while they study and will be Registered Nurses once they qualify. Clinical Support Workers are being recruited into this programme.
- The team is looking at expanding the number of 'Nursing Associate' trainees – when qualified these staff will be on the NMC register and can provide clinical

care, with the care planning and support of a Registered General Nurse. It involves a two-year course and the entry requirements do not require A Level equivalent qualifications, making it more accessible for more of our support staff. Nurse Associates can do a two-year top-up course to become a Registered Nurse giving our teams great career options.

Lorna said: "Our plan, moving forward, is instead of putting everyone on the straight four-year registered nurse degree course where you must have A Level equivalent study, trainees will do the two-year Nursing Associate course. The majority will then have the option to complete a further two years training to become a Registered Nurse."

Bridget Lees, Executive Chief Nurse for UHMBT, said: "The Nursing Associate role will be important in the organisation in the years to come. We already have a small number of Nurse Associates, and we are looking at many ways in which the role can integrate into our current workforce and fill the gap between the support worker and the registered nurse.

"At the moment we are training 40 Registered Nurse Degree Apprentices every year. Internal and external candidates can apply to be a Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice. We are also looking to increase the numbers of people on that course because we know the numbers of international nurses available to come to the UK will reduce in the next few years; our plans are to significantly expand the number of clinical nurse apprentices coming into the organisation over the next five years."

A story about one of the Trust's Registered Nurse Degree Apprentices, Cherish Otoo, can be viewed on this link on the Trust website.

Bridget said: "We are also looking at a Midwifery Apprentice Programme, children's nurses, and Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) such as physiotherapists, Operating Department Practitioners ODPs, occupational therapists and healthcare scientists to support that way of recruiting and training staff. The standard university route is expensive and lots of people simply cannot do it. To come out with a large amount of debt is simply not an option for many students.

"We think our approach will also help with retention because if colleagues have trained with us, they are likely to be living locally and stay local. A lot of work is taking place with the retention team to make it attractive for staff to stay with our Trust ensuring it is "a great place to work."

"Robust policies and guidance for colleagues underpin all the Safe Staffing improvement work. We have updated the Safe Staffing Escalation Policy, the Enhanced Care Policy and have created a Job Planning Policy. The policies support

how we plan people's work and deliver care, and how we escalate issues with staffing."

An electronic Safe Staffing Dashboard is being developed and, as an interim measure, the team is using a manual 'Safe Staffing Scorecard' which shows clinical indicators of quality alongside staffing data.

Lorna said: "On the Safe Staffing Scorecard, we can see quality or safety issues in departments, and look at the establishment of staff on that department and collate this information. Staffing information cannot be seen in isolation; staffing needs to sit next to quality measures to see if there is a correlation between any issues with quality and safety.

"Another improvement is electronic job planning. We had over 90 per cent of our eligible nursing workforce complete job planning, with fully signed off job plans developed by staff and their mangers. We were immensely proud of that."

Production of a five-year Nursing Workforce Strategy is also underway to detail international, national, and local recruitment models. This includes a focus on retention, training and "grow our own" initiatives.

Lorna added: "We need to think differently about how we recruit people and allow people to take smaller steps up the career ladder. We want to offer opportunities to people to climb the ladder and see where they could go in the future in their career. With a motivated, appreciated, and skilled workforce, everyone will be safer."

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