

Nursing associate employer case study

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust: Supporting integrated care



Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust offers specialist inpatient and community services supporting mental health, learning disabilities, addictions, brain injuries, physical health and children’s services. The trust’s clinical services are provided across more than 120 sites across the North West, with over 7,600 staff serving a population of almost 11 million people.

The trust’s aim is to play a full part in the health and social care economies it serves by promoting and driving greater integration between mental and physical health and social care.

Started training nursing associates in:	March 2017
Number of registered nursing associates:	14
Number of trainee nursing associates:	130 from March 2020

As an education liaison lead, Jane Woods provides strategic direction and support with implementing the nursing associate role. She explains why she wants all their trainee nursing associates to gain experience in learning disabilities and how the role contributes to delivering integrated, holistic care.

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Why did you decide to introduce the role?

“ The nursing associate role has always been supported by the trust’s board of directors. It was an opportunity for the organisation to support healthcare assistants who had worked in the role for years and wanted to develop but couldn’t fund themselves. This role also fits well with the trust’s integration agenda.

The trust joined the HEE trainee nursing associate programme as part of the North Mersey partnership, with the first cohort starting in March 2017 and qualifying in March 2019. We now have 14 qualified nursing associates and are on our sixth cohort of trainees, with roughly 70 due to start in March 2020.

How have you deployed TNAs and NAs in learning disabilities?

We decided where to place TNAs and NAs based on areas’ workforce planning. One of the areas in which we’ve introduced the TNA programme is learning disabilities (LD). As an organisation, it is a high priority to raise awareness of learning disabilities across all services, to make sure that we can provide the best possible care for people. We want to ensure that learning disabilities are considered whatever issue the patient presents with. We’re looking at all the TNAs having LD experience as part of their programme so they can take it back to other areas.

What were the key things you put in place to make the training programme run smoothly?

We have a practice education facilitator for nursing associates at the trust: Angela Charles. She supports the nursing associates with their learning and from a pastoral point of view. We plan to recruit an additional practice education facilitator as we scale up the programme.

“ *People can be afraid of change so it’s important to explain the role.*

Preparing areas that have not supported TNAs previously is crucial. Staff need to be aware of what a TNA can do, the parameters of their role and how it differs from the HCA or the registered nurse and the assessment criteria.

Angela visited areas across the trust to explain the role, alongside a practice education facilitator for the North Mersey partnership. As the role is generic and the TNAs attend placements in different settings, it was important to discuss how it would work in each setting and make staff aware of how to work with TNAs from different backgrounds.

For example, for someone from a general nursing background, going into mental health can be a very different challenge. It is important to allay some of the fears. And because the TNAs are our employees we need to ensure they have good support while they’re on our programme and once they’re qualified.

Initially, staff were a bit apprehensive but as we have had more TNAs who have gone on to placements in other areas, staff are seeing the value and how a nursing associate would complement their team.



Jane Woods
Education Liaison Lead,
Mersey Care NHS
Foundation Trust

What benefits has the nursing associate role brought to your organisation?

The nursing associate role is having a positive impact on patient care and the patient experience. We get better outcomes for the patient because nursing associates are skilled in all fields of nursing and settings and can look at the patient holistically.

For example, they might work in a mental health setting but can bring their experience of physical health settings or vice versa. In mental health wards, because they have a skill and knowledge base in physical health, they're not only providing care but doing health promotion, such as encouraging patients to ride bikes or take other exercise. In A&E, trainee nursing associates with mental health training can help de-escalate people who are agitated.



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They’re bridging the gap between HCAs and nurses. Now that we have qualified nursing associates, the nurses see them as an essential part of the nursing team and really value the role. It’s having a positive impact on staff morale and we’re keeping more nurses because they feel more supported.

The role is great for valuing and upskilling your staff and having a more knowledgeable workforce. This is an amazing opportunity for HCAs; they’ve seen other people progress and thought ‘I can do it too’.

What advice would you give to other organisations on introducing the role?

Make sure you prepare all the areas where you want to introduce trainee nursing associates, ensuring that your practice education facilitator can go out to teams to talk about the role, challenges, what works and what doesn’t. Having one point of contact for the TNAs has really worked for us, as she can prepare all the areas and be their point of contact.

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To find out more about nursing associates, please visit: www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/nursing-associates