

End of Fellowship Report 2022/23 Dr Nicola Lester

My fellowship was with the Primary Care School Training Hub Outreach team.

Introduction

I am passionate about the Primary Care workforce. I wanted to focus my fellowship in promoting Primary Care as the nurturing and exciting career pathway it can be.

Last year's fellow went into schools to plant early seeds of NHS career pathways. The 350+ team runs some fantastic events with colleges and secondary schools including AHP Day, Careers Fairs, Myth Buster sessions and specific talks on request to those interested in a health care profession. The Training Hub runs events at universities on their health care careers fairs.

Based on these, I wanted to focus on recruitment of those who would not necessarily have access to the above events, who would not have thought of Primary Care as a career pathway, and also to address some aspects of the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda of the primary care workforce.

Diversity of the workforce is essential in being able to offer a more inclusive service and improve patient care. Furthermore, recruitment of the local community to the primary care workforce leads to a deeper understanding and will help the primary care services to support the changing needs and expectations of their specific population. This supports the PCN models where services can be commissioned for their local population.

Advertisement

A survey of 13 surgeries revealed that the majority of adverts placed for Primary Care jobs are on the NHS jobs websites, as well as some other sites such as their own facebook page, LMC website and Indeed. The NHS jobs website says "Around 25,000 vacancies are advertised every month on the NHS jobs website in more than 350 different careers." However, if a job seeker has not thought of the NHS as a career, why would they specifically go on the NHS jobs website? Advertisements need to be placed where the average job seekers are looking, reaching into the community. There is also an NHS jobs quiz that helps the user see what job may interest them, but there are no primary care jobs suggested.

Other programmes

I spoke to Steve Aylwin, the Head of Workforce Transformation and Digital Workforce in Dorset who ran an exciting programme in Dorset with the Department of Work and Pensions. This was a 5-week programme for admin roles that included CV writing, interview practice, IT system teaching as well as a short placement. This was very well received by the local GPs and this is being extended. I would be keen to pick up aspects of this programme to be reflected in the programme I am hoping to develop. These include support with CV and interview practice, presenting a realistic overview of the job, question and answer sessions and additional support for the potential employees.

Another avenue I explored was the Prince's Trust. I was aware of their agenda through a local COVID vaccination recruitment programme run locally. I attended a virtual day about recruitment to health and social careers and thought their programme would be suitable for these reasons:

1. They reach out to their contacts in the local community for potential participants
2. Help is offered with CV writing, interview practice, exploring the values etc of the NHS, and they look for participants who fit the job description of the employer

- 3. If successful, the participants have follow-up mentoring for 6 months with the Prince's Trust. If not successful, then participants are helped to tackle their weaker points, put through other programmes and then introduced into other potential employers
4. If needed, they would help support successful participants with money for travel to practise prior to first pay cheque etc

The question was, how could this be developed for Primary Care? The majority of the Prince's Trust programmes had been run for secondary care, where jobs were all within the same employer. This would be more of a challenge for Primary Care as there would be multiple separate employers and a smaller number of jobs per employer. With Primary Care under the strain it is at present, would the individual employers/practices be prepared to hold the jobs open for 5 weeks whilst the recruitment programme and interviews took place? And would the surgeries be able to commit to interviewing on the date suggested – they would all need to align?

The Programme

I liaised with Sarah Bowman, the Head of Partnerships, Health and Social care in the South region, to help design a programme, but we needed the commitment of the employers.

During this time, I was able to speak to Nicola Decker (the clinical lead of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICS) and, from her team, Kush Nijhar Apprenticeship Lead with the Thames Valley Primary Care Workforce team and I approached some local PCN's to see if they would be interested. However, they were not receptive due to the time needed to hold the positions open and a minimum number of jobs and participants are needed to run the programme.

It was then I was put in contact with Eve Haworth (People Manager at HIOW ICS) who was planning a large recruitment event for Primary Care that our programme would fit well into.

The Idea

A regional event would be held, the Prince's Trust would reach out to their contacts and also an advert would go out on Indeed. Any 18-30 year old that fits the Prince's Trust criteria who expresses an interest would be offered the Prince's Trust programme. We would also run webinars prior to the interview day for all interested participants. These would discuss the different roles being advertised and offer question and answer time. They would be run at lunchtimes and late/after work to try to be convenient for all.

On the day the participants would arrive, have a chance to have a hot drink and a chat to representatives of the Prince's Trust and HEE prior to their interview.

We have designed some recommended interview questions to be as friendly as possible to make the participants feel relaxed and get the best out of the candidates.

With Eve's budget, she also is planning on using this opportunity to promote wellbeing amongst the Practice staff with coffee, providing links to wellbeing and others.

Those successful at interview will also have 6 months mentorship through the Princes' Trust, and those not successful would be picked up by the Prince's Trust team on the day, at the event, so they can be supported and be put on further programmes including 1-2-1 help with further employability.

The above idea was presented to the PCN leads in October 2022. Unfortunately, at the time with winter pressures and the strain on Primary Care, no one wished to take up the event at the time. However, an event is currently being set up to run in February 2023 in South East Wessex. I am hopeful that the event will lead to further areas taking up the event in the future.

Conclusion

This year has been an incredible opportunity not only to develop the project, but also for self-discovery. Although the project has not always been smooth sailing, each setback, delay or disappointment has given me greater insight into the workings of the NHS, Primary Care and workforce that I will take forward into my future career.

I have also had the opportunity to speak to groups of 6th form students interested in a career in health care in conjunction with the 350+ team, examine OSCE exams for medical students, lead 3rd year medical student teaching and attend the Next Generation GP programme of events.

The study budget will be used to do a post graduate certificate in Medical Education with the University of Winchester and a 4-day Peak Health Coaching Course in 2023. These will help to broaden my knowledge to be able to support and educate health care professionals, but also build on my passion for the Primary Care workforce by building on my skills of team management and empowering others to reach their potential.

My final word is one of thanks to everyone who has taken the time to support me during this fellowship: to the practice managers and GP's who took the time to fill in surveys and attend qualitative interviews; to Steve Aylwin, Kush Nijhar and Nicola Decker for taking the time to attend interviews; to Sarah Bowman at the Prince's Trust and Eve Haworth for engaging with me in developing the programme and helping to intertwine it with her current recruitment events; to Heath Education England for offering these fellowships and to Sue Clarke, my mentor and support throughout the year who encouraged me and helped me to see the learning even during the harder moments.