

# Cutting length of stay at Whittington Hospital NHS Trust

## How using competences to develop new roles delivered a more productive workforce.



When Whittington Hospital NHS Trust was invited to test Skills for Health's workforce tools and solutions, managers used the opportunity to modernise services, improve patient care and develop the skills of staff to meet this aim.

The Trust was looking at new roles as part of its requirement to address national initiatives and local financial pressures and already had considerable experience of role redesign and change management.

The Trust decided to develop a new role at assistant practitioner level using Skills for Health competences for a new approach to role design. Managers and staff identified Therapies as an ideal service area for the new role.

With the new roles in place, patients were seen more quickly and the quality of care was judged to have improved. Patients had to see fewer staff, leading to better continuity of care and a more personalised approach, and the length of stay on the wards reduced dramatically.

### Benefits

- Reduced length of stay for patients over a two year period, down from 17 to 12 days in care of older people wards and 24 to 18 days for stroke patients
- New Therapy Assistant roles boost multidisciplinary team working
- Enhanced workforce productivity and team efficiency
- Patients better able to manage at home after discharge
- Job profiles easier to produce
- Greater opportunity for career progression for those in new roles
- Post holders went on to complete NVQ level 3 course in Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy.

*“The Therapy Assistant roles, combined with other activities, have made a valuable contribution towards enabling the hospital to achieve bed saving days for neuro stroke patients and care of older people.*”

*We found the quality of care improved and in future there is potential for reduced re-admittance rates.”*

#### Adrienne Simons

Service Manager for Physiotherapy, OT & Rehabilitation, Whittington Hospital NHS Trust

# What we did

Using Skills for Health competences for a new approach to role design, two clinical Therapy Assistant roles - one focused on the care of the older patient and the other working closely with stroke patients - were mapped out and recruited to.

## Impact on patients, staff and wider team

The Therapy Assistant roles soon proved how they could support more flexibility within teams. Thanks to their competence-based training, the newly skilled Therapy Assistants were able to carry out interventions which qualified staff would have limited time to complete in the acute setting.

The post holders demonstrated they had developed and utilised transferable knowledge and skills. Patients were seen more quickly and frequently at the hospital's Jeffrey Kelson unit and the quality of care was judged to have improved within the unit.

Work colleagues welcomed the positive impact of the new roles. As a result, staff are able to spend more time with patients who have been able to leave hospital better prepared to manage at home.

## Changing the culture

Managers and colleagues from the allied health professions noted that the Therapy Assistants provided a vital link between Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy teams. This underlined the importance of integrating working practices by breaking through working in silos - the new posts have offered a practical way of achieving this. In future, the Therapy Assistant role will be developed into a generic post as it has demonstrated even more benefits for team working and seamless service provision.

Having seen that a competence-based approach really can deliver, the Trust is applying the lessons to a pilot in orthopaedics teams using an agreed process for developing new roles and a tool for role/service redesign.

*“Taking a competence based approach to role design has helped us to pinpoint exactly the right skills to meet the needs of patients, and this strategy has proven a real success.”*

**Adrienne Simons**  
Service Manager for  
Physiotherapy, OT &  
Rehabilitation, Whittington  
Hospital NHS Trust

**To find out more about how Skills for Health's competence-based new approach to role design can help you visit [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/roles](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/roles), or contact us now to find out how we can help you achieve greater quality and productivity.**

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