

# Flexible training for support staff improves service quality

## Career Framework helps NHS Lothian develop Healthcare Support Worker role in mental health and learning disability services.



### The challenge

Despite much investment over recent years in the healthcare support workforce in acute settings, there are areas in other services which have been bypassed. NHS Lothian recognised that the role of Healthcare Support Workers in both mental health and learning disabilities is evolving, with potential for new roles at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the career framework. Recent policy changes have also highlighted the importance of role development in mental health and learning disabilities services<sup>1</sup>.

Appropriately trained and competent Healthcare Support Workers are vital in the delivery of quality patient care. Understanding their important contribution, NHS Lothian reviewed existing Healthcare Support Worker roles and explored new roles in mental health and learning disability services at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the career framework.

## Benefits

- Healthcare Support Workers undertaking education and training at levels 2 and 3 found it improved their awareness of mental health and learning disability issues, changed their practices and encouraged them to think of alternative approaches with clients.
- Healthcare Support Workers and Assistant Practitioners in Mental Health and Learning Disability services have a clear pathway across career framework.
- Project has enabled staff to step on and step off the career framework at levels 2, 3 and 4, with some progressing on to level 5 and beyond.
- Competence based training linked to career framework ensures nationally applicable and transferable learning.

*“By providing flexible training and education in bite size pieces, NHS Lothian has enabled people to progress up and along the career framework.*”

*“We are proud that we can now say that all our services are developing Healthcare Support Workers through level 2 to 5 of the Career framework and staff can develop a range of skills at the right level to help them provide the best and most timely care possible for our patients.”*

### Maggie Byers

Lead Practitioner for non registered workforce development, NHS Lothian

<sup>1</sup> 'Modernising Nursing Careers (MNC): Setting the Direction' (DoH 2006); 'Better Health, Better Care: Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today' (SGHD 2007); 'Valuing People Now: a new three-year strategy for people with learning disabilities' (Department of Health 2009); 'Rights, Relationships and Recovery' (SEHD 2006).

# What they did

It was a priority to achieve clear standards for job roles of Healthcare Support Workers, Senior Healthcare Support Workers and Assistant Practitioner. Job descriptions and Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) outlines were agreed for the Healthcare Support Workers and Senior Healthcare Support Workers roles, while the job description and KSF outline for the Assistant Practitioner role is still under consultation.

The Assistant Practitioner role is a relatively new concept within service. Although there was very little national guidance regarding this role at the start of this project, NHS Lothian were able to work with Skills for Health taking guidance on Assistant Practitioner roles. Following initial discussions with further and higher education Institutions they established that Queen Margaret University and Jewel & Esk College were delivering modules at the right SCQF level that would fit the AP role. NHS Lothian is also an approved vocational qualifications centre in its own right, enabling staff to access programmes delivered in flexible settings through a combination of in-house, local and national provision.

## Making a positive impact on work practices and patient care

The result was a variety of training and education provision to meet the needs of staff at career framework levels 2, 3 and 4. This ranged from a three-day introductory course, and SVQ Health and Social Care level 2, through to Higher Education Diploma (SCQF 8) in Health and Social Care and a Professional Development Award.

- 35 staff have completed or are undertaking education at level 2 of the career framework
- 15 have completed or are undertaking education at level 3 of the career framework
- 11 completed the HNC in Healthcare and went on to access Year 2 of the Diploma of Higher Education in Nursing or Bachelor of Nursing. On completion, these students will be at level 5 of the career framework.

Initial evaluation shows that Healthcare Support Workers undertaking education and training at levels 2 and 3 found it improved their awareness of mental health and learning disability issues. They stated the training changed their attitudes to clients, and encouraged them to think about what they were doing and why they were doing it a particular way. It also encouraged them to think of alternative approaches with clients, and changed their practices.

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**Tel:** 0117 922 1155

**E-mail:** [info@skillsforhealth.org.uk](mailto:info@skillsforhealth.org.uk)

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