

Legacy Mentoring; a strategic tool to retain talent and build resilience in our cancer workforce

The challenge

Local cancer services are facing increasing workforce pressures exacerbated by losing knowledge and experience as cancer nurses nearing retirement choose to retire early or leave the NHS.

Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) have less time to support the development of new CNSs alongside managing their own complex workload.

The profile of the new cancer CNS is changing with fewer new CNSs having oncology experience and therefore requiring additional support during induction period.

The opportunity

The NHS England legacy mentor project for early career support provided the template for a WCA pilot project to retain experienced cancer nurses.

Recommendations from a WCA project (2023) included exploration of a formal mentorship offer to provide proactive support and leadership to newly appointed cancer CNSs, supporting the cancer nursing team leads.

What we did

- Funded 4 legacy mentor roles (0.2WTE) in four acute Trusts to support a 12 month pilot project and supported recruitment of four retired experienced cancer nurses to these roles
- Agreed a structured mentor process to guide legacy mentor support for novice cancer CNSs, usually in the first year of their cancer CNS career
- Developed a mentor project toolkit providing standardisation of mentoring practice and collation of impact data for evaluation from the project outset
- Obtained funding from the national ACCEND NHSE programme for project management and evaluation of the pilot project

Outcome

- A total of 48 cancer nurses were supported through the pilot mentor programme. Mentoring has shown to support an increase in a new CNS's confidence to undertake their role and supported retention of this valued workforce
- Decades of cancer nursing knowledge was retained and returned to the NHS. The legacy mentors themselves found this a satisfying experience: "It's been a privilege and a pleasure to be entrusted with being a mentor to the CNS workforce."

Outputs

- Toolkit to guide and support the mentoring relationship
- Tailored development opportunities have been developed and commissioned to meet the needs of the new CNS workforce with a key focus on communications skills training
- Development of a CNS Induction Toolkit to guide organisations in supporting a personalised development pathway for all newly recruited cancer CNS

Examples of mentee feedback:

"Without mentoring intervention, I wouldn't still be in my current role"

"The mentoring intervention has definitely helped me to feel more confident in my current role, providing support, guidance and encouragement"

"It has significantly boosted my sense of self-worth and value within the NHS"

"It has made me feel more valued"

"Really appreciated the experience of my legacy mentor in helping me navigate the processes in the NHS and some more complex patient scenarios"

Scan here to download the CNS Induction Toolkit



Scan here to download the Mentor Toolkit

