

Q ACTIVE

1. Case metadata

▪ **Country of origin:**

United Kingdom (UK)

▪ **Year of publication by agency:**

2012

▪ **Sector:**

Human health and social work activities - Human health activities - Hospital activities (86.1)

▪ **Keywords:**

- Case studies (24401C),
- Good practice (24361C)
- Co-operation (02721C)
- Networks (02761D)
- Health and safety policy (04361D)
- Workplace health promotion (22881C)
- Exercise and physical activity (22961D)
- Health monitoring and screening (22971D)
- Healthy eating (22981D)
- Health promotion programs (23001D)
- Healthy life-style (23041D)
- Mental health promotion (23046D)
- Well-being (23076D)

▪ **Abstract**

Issue

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) is one of the biggest trusts in England. It provides services to 2.5 million residents in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire with additional specialist services to around 3-4 million residents from other counties. It is also a teaching hospital. In 2005, it launched the biggest hospital workplace fitness programme in the UK, serving more than 13,000 staff. The programme, called Q Active aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of staff and focused on removing barriers for participation in exercise for staff. The aim of the approach was to change the health culture of the organisation and staff of a large National Health Service (NHS) Trust to become a health promoting organisation where staff leads by example and is actively encouraged and empowered to make healthy choices at work.

Action

The programme included a diverse range of health activities, for example the creation of a dedicated wellbeing room with fitness classes and complementary therapies, a staff gym, promotion of cycling and walking etc.

To embed the health programme into the organisation's policy, NUH employs a dedicated health and wellbeing coordinator who takes the lead in implementing health and wellbeing activities across NUH as well as managing the Q Active programme. This coordinator works closely with occupational health and other Trust departments. A team of workplace 'health champions' successfully promote



health activities. These champions are self-nominated employees who promote participation in the scheme on a voluntary basis. They do so by a range of methods, which include displaying promotional materials in their departments, assisting at health promotion events, talking to and encouraging employees to participate in health-promoting activities offered by the Trust, and by acting as role models for positive health behaviours. Both for quality assurance and continuing professional development for health champions, these individuals are provided with the option of undertaking the Royal Society for Public Health Level 2 Award in Understanding Health Improvement through a partnership with the University of Nottingham. NUH takes a partnership approach to delivering its health and wellbeing strategy. As well as internal partnerships between departments who support staff with all aspects of health and wellbeing, NUH has developed many external partnerships. The partnership ideas approach facilitates the sharing of ideas and expertise.

Results

After five years of the programme, many staff were engaging in positive lifestyle behaviours (i.e. walking, cycling, running, gym work outs and attending fitness classes); there were a higher proportion of employees meeting the current recommendations for daily physical activity and there was an increase in the proportion of people who actively travelled to work. Additionally, a decrease in self-reported sickness absence and an increase in perceived job satisfaction were reported.

2. Organisations involved

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH), formerly Queen's Medical Centre (QMC), City Hospital and Ropewalk House

3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) is a National Health Service (NHS) Trust formed in 2006 as a result of a merger between Queen's Medical Centre (QMC) and City Hospital. It is now one of the biggest hospital Trusts in England, with over 13,000 employees. NUH staff is based at three sites: QMC, City Hospital and Ropewalk House. They provide services to 2.5 million residents in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire with additional specialist services to around 3-4 million residents from other counties. They are also a teaching hospital with strong relationships with local universities.

NUH understands that work, health and wellbeing of its employees are interlinked and continually work with staff to promote a culture where wellbeing is embraced by all. In 2005, it launched the biggest hospital workplace fitness programme in an NHS setting in the UK. Q Active was one of the first programmes within a UK hospital devoted to removing barriers to participation in exercise for staff and dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of staff and increasing opportunities for staff to make healthy lifestyle choices. The holistic and partnership approach taken by NUH is leading the way in changing the hospital culture and prioritising the importance of encouraging and supporting staff to improve their health. The success of the project has led to it being fully embedded as an integral part of the Trust's overall Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.2. Aims

The aim of this programme was to change the health culture of NUH Trust to become a health-promoting organisation where NHS staff leads by example and is actively encouraged and empowered to make healthy choices at work.

The project was set up in response to a White Paper called 'Choosing Health' which was set out by the government and calls for setting examples for workplace health promotion. Since then, the health and wellbeing agenda at NUH has continued to be influenced by more recent policy and documents, including the NHS Health and Wellbeing Review in 2009 which made a strong business case for improving staff health and wellbeing.

The NUH's strategy on health and wellbeing aims at:

CASE STUDIES

- creating a safe and healthy working environment;
- improving physical and emotional wellbeing;
- encouraging and supporting employees to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle;
- supporting people with manageable health problems or disabilities to maintain access to or regain work;
- improving staff satisfaction, recruitment and retention;
- providing a framework whereby NUH can evaluate its health and wellbeing interventions.

Other motivating factors related to the approach include reducing sickness levels and changing the health culture of an NHS organisation in order to improve the patient care.

The programme started from the recognition of the need to support staff to make healthier lifestyle choices.

3.3. *What was done, and how?*

Q Active is the brand name for a range of in-house activities for staff at NUH. Originally set up at the Queen's Medical Centre NHS Trust before the creation of NUH in 2006, the project was pioneered by Professor Mark Batt, Director of the Centre of Sports Medicine. The Q Active programme received £300,000 (c €342,000) from a funding stream called 'Active England', an investment programme from Sport England and the Big Lottery Fund. Sport England is a Government agency that supports and develops sport at grassroots and community levels. Active England was a specific funding stream set up by the Big Lottery Fund and distributed by Sport England, to facilitate innovative ideas including workplace activities. Q Active was launched in 2005 as the biggest hospital workplace fitness programmes in the UK. Geoff Cooke, former international cyclist opened the programme at a launch event.

NUH takes a holistic view of health and wellbeing and has a number of human resources (HR) and health and safety policies which impact on this. These include a psychological wellbeing at work policy, work-life balance policies (flexible working, career breaks), dignity at work champions to address bullying and harassment at work and a new health and attendance policy to manage sickness, which has a preventative element. Transport and environmental policies support active commuting.

Q Active was viewed by the Trust as a successful scheme, which resulted in it being embedded as an integral part of NUH health and wellbeing strategy. This overarching strategy was introduced in June 2010 and underpins all the work undertaken at NUH which impacts on staff health and wellbeing.

NUH employs a dedicated health and wellbeing coordinator who takes the lead in implementing health and wellbeing activities such as dancing and sports at NUH (Fig. 1 and 2) as well as managing the Q Active programme and works closely with occupational health and other departments to deliver health and wellbeing activities. The director of HR is the executive sponsor for health and wellbeing at NUH. There is support from the Trust Board and Trade Union colleagues.

CASE STUDIES

Figure 1 : “Dance” (NUH)



Figure 2: “Sports” (NUH)



Activities in a workplace wellness programme

A wellbeing room at QMC campus of NUH Trust (Queen’s Medical Centre) was created with a range of fitness classes plus complementary therapies (e.g. massage) (Fig. 3 - 5). When the project was launched in 2005 employees were encouraged to take part by providing free taster sessions during the launch week, with each day of the launch week assigned a different theme. There were also demonstrations and ‘freebies’ each lunchtime in the staff restaurant as part of this launch. The programme has since been rolled out across the whole of NUH since the merger, with onsite classes and activities now also taking place at the additional hospital sites.

A number of other initiatives have been introduced as part of a wider workplace wellness programme:

- use of the physiotherapy department gym with subsidised prices for Q Active members outside of clinic times;
- a series of free educational fact sheets on how to eat well and feel better;
- information on Active Commuting including:
 - information on where cycle facilities are on campus;
 - renovating cycle facilities at the Trust;
 - QMC and City Hospital walk maps (one map for each campus) – pocket sized maps were developed for both sites showing walking routes round campus or nearby with details of how far and how long;
 - a Bicycle Users Group which provides a forum for bicycle users to have input into developments on cycling at NUH;
 - Bike Mileage 10p per mile (c €0.11) is paid to staff who use their bikes to commute for work journeys; staff can claim this on normal travel expense claim forms;
 - occasional parking for bike users;
 - purchase of bikes through a salary sacrifice scheme (a scheme where payments for the bike are taken directly from salary each month over a 12 month period, savings are made on tax and National Insurance savings making the purchase of a bike cheaper);
 - secure bike parking, showers and changing facilities;
- weight loss services on site: a drop in service from Weight Watchers, and a 12 week evaluation trial with Slimming World where 140 staff were offered free places;
- free quarterly programme of health checks for staff delivered by occupational health nurses;
- collaborations with external gyms and health clubs to provide subsidised gym membership for staff (Fig 5);

CASE STUDIES

- personal pledges and prize draws, including an online pledge just after New Year with examples given of small changes staff can make and random prize draws for those who make a pledge;
- Dignity at Work champions to support staff experiencing bullying at work;
- a physiotherapy service for staff;
- improved catering, in the past, NUH has had external caterers who were contracted to provide all the food at QMC. This meant NUH had less control over the food provided. To be able to have control on the quality of the food they started with in house catering. Nutritional information is given on sandwich boxes, a salad bar was set up and free vegetables are given with all main meals, healthy options are provided. NUH received the Soil Association award for the use of local products.

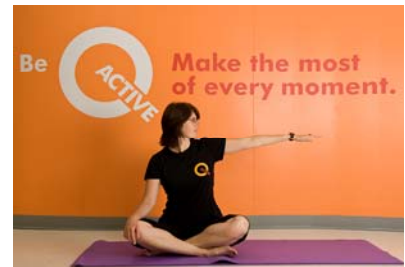
Figure 3: “Cycling” (NUH)



Figure 4: “Running” (NUH)



Figure 5: “Yoga” (NUH)



Exercise classes, the gym and therapies are self-financing through the fees staff pay. Prices are set at affordable levels with extra discounts available for regular users. Additional funding is occasionally sought from NUH's Staff Lottery for other specific events.

Employees' involvement and motivation

To incorporate the health and wellbeing activities into the organisation, there is regular communication to staff through a corporate communications team. Staff are consulted about health priorities and information is also taken from the NHS Staff Survey.

The approach foresees employee support mechanisms and joint working with staff, their representatives and local partners to identify and address areas for improvement. The close incorporation of employees in the planning phase ensures that services developed are needs-based and enables the identification and minimisation of those issues, which may impact negatively on staff health.

Health champions are recruited to promote the health activities. These champions are self-nominated employees who promote participation in the scheme on a voluntary basis, with the option for accredited training provided by the University of Nottingham.

In addition, there are Improving Working Lives steering groups within departments, an active Take a Break campaign was conducted, promotional articles are posted on the staff intranet and posters are distributed. Each department set up an Improving Working Lives action plan and a campaign called 'Here for you' to encourage staff to devise and implement ideas for improving the service provided. Wellbeing weeks and health promotion events are regularly organised and reported on. The June 2011 newsletter reported on the 'Health and wellbeing week'.

Training is provided to managers on supporting staff with mental health problems. A managers' standards website has been produced to assist managers with supervising staff. Training is provided on appraisals and on managing sickness absence. There is a range of internal and mandatory training programmes for staff, which support health and wellbeing including conflict resolution, values and behaviours as well as health and safety aspects.

To motivate employees to participate, NUH aims to take into account staff needs by providing a range of activities at different times and venues, including discounts for external providers and developing a wide ranging holistic programme to take into account all aspects of working life which impact on staff health and wellbeing. This allows employees to choose whatever fits best with their specific needs.



Partnership approach

NUH takes a holistic and partnership approach to delivering its health and wellbeing strategy. As well as internal partnerships between departments who support staff with all aspects of health and wellbeing, NUH has developed a number of external partnerships. The University of Nottingham has worked closely with NUH for the duration of these activities, and sit on the Q Active management team. The university engages with the team in evaluation of Q Active activities and in training of workplace health champions. Q Active have also received significant funding from successful bids to the University of Nottingham for philanthropic funds which initiated the opening of access to NUH health and wellbeing activities for several thousand university staff and students who are based on NUH sites. NUH has worked with the local Primary Care Trust (now known as Nottingham City Health) and Nottingham City Council to set up joint initiatives such as touch rugby and netball. For the cycle promotion and events there is a partnership with Sustrans, the national charity for sustainable transport. A specific project has been launched called Ucycle Nottingham in October 2009 with Sustrans, NUH and both Nottingham universities. The programme aimed at increasing the number of staff and students cycling by implementing a range of promotional activities and incentives.

Advantages of a partnership approach and challenges faced

The advantage of a partnership approach is that it gives possibility to share ideas and good practices such as initiatives that have particularly worked with engaging staff or sharing marketing materials/policies, developing joint initiatives such as Back to Netball and Touch Rugby. Potential for sharing resources are being explored as well.

3.4. What was achieved?

The staff at the QMC were surveyed in 2005 before the Q Active launch to give a baseline measure of their levels of physical activity and attitudes to physical activity. At the outset, almost half the employees were physically inactive (45.2%), and almost half were overweight or obese (43%). Over half (56.5%) did not consume five servings of fruit/vegetables per day, 10% were smokers and 4.6% reported sickness absence in the last 4 weeks. Physically inactive employees were significantly less likely to engage in positive health behaviours than their active counterparts. The staff were resurveyed to measure any improvements as a result of the Q Active programme in 2007 and in 2010.

At the 5-year mark, significantly more respondents actively travelled to work and for non-work trips and more were active whilst at work. Significantly more respondents met current recommendations for physical activity at 5 years than at baseline. Significantly lower sickness absence and greater job satisfaction was reported at 5 years than at baseline. As a result of the partnership work with Sustrans on the Ucycle Nottingham project, cycling levels amongst NUH staff have increased from 10% to 15%.

3.5. Success factors

- Engaging employees by making them health champions and encouraging them to motivate other employees is a well-established and well working measure, which perfectly works within this health promotion programme.
- NUH employed a dedicated health and wellbeing coordinator who takes the lead in implementing health and wellbeing activities at NUH as well as managing the Q Active programme and works closely with occupational health and other departments to deliver health and wellbeing activities. Having one person being responsible and managing the overall approach of the programme was especially important when taking into account the size of the trust and the number of staff involved.
- The partnership approach that has been used resulted in a lot of extensive partnerships working between internal departments as well as external partners. It gave the possibility to share ideas, good practice as well as knowledge and resources.
- The health-promoting programme is now clearly embedded within the NHS Trust infrastructure. The project is now fully embedded in a wider health and wellbeing strategy,



has been renamed NUH Active to identify it as a whole hospital scheme and is one strand of a wider programme of work dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of staff at NUH.

3.6. Further information

NUH:

Steph Knowles, Health & Wellbeing Coordinator

e-mail: Steph.Knowles@nuh.nhs.uk

Tel: + 44 (0) 115 9249924 ext. 64771

Christine Woolley, Assistant Director of Human Resources (health and wellbeing lead)

e-mail : christine.woolley@nuh.nhs.uk

Tel: + 44 (0) 115 969116 ext. 76110

Information on how Q Active was set up:

Professor Mark Batt, Director of Sports Medicine Centre

e-mail: mark.batt@nottingham.ac.uk

Tel: + 44 (0) 115 9249924 ext. 63491

University of Nottingham Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences:

Holly Blake

e-mail: holly.blake@nottingham.ac.uk

Tel: + 44 (0) 115 8231049

3.7. Transferability

The Q Active initiators are working with their neighbouring trusts to roll out similar programmes. The Q Active facilitators are also working on ideas to promote workplace wellness to other employers, also to smaller companies and institutes. NUH is part of the East Midlands Platform on food, health and physical activity. They provide mentoring for other Platform members. In general, the programme that is conducted at NUH can of course mainly serve as a role model for other big companies and

employers. However, some actions taken at Q Active are universal and would probably be successful at different workplaces. The above mentioned ambassador approach is one of these actions but also the fact, that there was one person appointed for being responsible for the overall approach.

4. References, resources:

- <http://www.nuh.nhs.uk/healthandwellbeing>