

Onsite Exercise Cuts NHS Staff Sickness Rates



It is a common issue with NHS in the UK that its own staff often falls sick. Staff sickness rates at the NHS are much higher than in the rest of the economy. However, the situation at the Walton Centre is much improved.

Physiotherapist Katy Walker highlights how playing netball with her colleagues helped her cope better with a job that can have both physical and mental impact on one's health. Working with patients who have been in the Intensive Care Unit can be quite demanding as they've lost a great deal of muscle tone during the time they were sedated and ventilated. It is also mentally demanding to build a relationship and rapport with these patients and to help them cope with any setbacks during their recovery.

Walker says, "Keeping fit and exercising, I think it helps you to eat healthily, just to be physically healthy, mentally healthy. So that definitely contributes to a healthy lifestyle and cutting sickness rates."

The hospital set up a netball team a few years ago as a strategy to deal with the high level of staff sickness, over 7 percent a year with a workforce of around 1300 people. This figure had a tendency to increase during winters. Since the hospital staff is expected to take care of patients, it is important to retain their health and well-being. High rates of sickness can have significant financial implications for a healthcare organisation.

Chief executive Chris Harrop explains, "you have to run a service, so you have to backfill, quite often you're using very expensive methods to do that." He is referring to temporary staff through agencies that have to be called in during such situations. This could be quite expensive.

The idea of activity and exercise classes was thus implemented and now this hospital has a netball team, a football team, a running club, Pilates classes, massage and aromatherapy, weight management programmes and a host of other schemes and activities. The goal is to increase physical activity and reduce the stress of the staff. The strategy has resulted in a decline in the sickness rate from 7 percent to 4 percent.

Mike Gibney, the Walton Centre's director of workforce emphasises on the need to build a good culture in hospitals and to make the staff feel valued so that they can in turn value patients. Overall, a healthy workforce will result in better care for patients as well as a reduction in staff costs.

Source: [BBC](#)

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