

Pathway to Excellence® Case Study: Northampton General Hospital Northampton, England

Nursing and midwifery professions across the United Kingdom (UK) face challenges in recruitment and retention, with thousands of unfilled vacancies within the National Health Service (NHS). At Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust in the East Midlands, the problem had grown especially acute.

With vacancy rates exceeding 18 percent, nursing leaders sought new ways to improve the work environment, raise staff morale, and give nurses a stronger voice. ANCC's Pathway to Excellence® Program and its six practice standards provided the ideal framework to achieve these goals. Northampton's leaders believed that pursuing the credential would create a positive practice environment that would empower nurses, improve job satisfaction, and aid recruitment and retention.

In 2019, Northampton General Hospital became the first district general hospital in the UK to achieve Pathway to Excellence designation. The Pathway journey provided the impetus to positively transform the hospital's culture, leading to significant quality, satisfaction, and vacancy improvements.

Sustaining the Gains Through Leadership Transition

One of the biggest challenges the hospital faced was the departure of its chief nursing officer mid-way through the nurse survey period. The Pathway team had to find ways to maintain high visibility and engagement with staff during this time of transition. How did they sustain momentum? Tactics included:

- Disco-themed survey stations
- Regular updates to staff on Facebook
- T-shirts with "Keep Calm and Survey" on them
- Deploying to different areas of the hospital to offer support, if requested
- A 'totalizer' (similar to a fundraising total), updated and shared weekly with staff, which kept a running tally of survey completions

Finding New Ways to Engage Staff

Taking the Pathway journey led to the development of multiple initiatives that empower nurses to influence the care they provide. For example, the hospital has created more than 20 shared decision-making councils that give nurses at all levels a voice. Members of one of the councils,

"Fighting FIT (Falls, Infection Prevention, Tissue Viability)," have collaborated to develop a safety board to regularly communicate the most up-to-date information throughout the hospital.

The Pathway journey also led to greater interaction and engagement among the wider interdisciplinary team. The entire organization is now better connected and informed about positive work across a wide variety of areas. Staff recognition is emphasized. In addition to the DAISY Award for nurses and midwives, the hospital has created the NGH Hero Award for other clinical and non-clinical staff. Leadership programs are in place to promote professional development and advancement.

Improving Vacancy Rates and Outcomes

With the Pathway Standards embedded across the organization, the hospital has achieved dramatic improvements in nursing-sensitive indicators:

- **Nurse vacancy rate** was cut from 18% to 11%
- **Pressure ulcers** fell from 1.2 per 1,000 bed days to just 0.5
- **C. difficile** cases were reduced from 31 in 2015-2016 to 20 in 2017-2018
- **Patient experience** scores improved with a reduction from 15% to only 6% of patients ranking the hospital in the bottom 20%,

"Becoming the first Pathway-recognized organization in the UK is an incredible achievement," says Tara Pauley, Associate Director of Nursing. "It has helped us address the nursing shortage by creating a positive practice environment, empowering staff, and improving satisfaction. We have been educating the rest of the country about the value of this prestigious recognition from ANCC and the significance it holds."

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About Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust

Northampton General Hospital provides the full range of outpatient, diagnostic, inpatient, and day case elective and emergency care, as well as a growing range of specialist treatments to the communities throughout Northamptonshire, England. The Trust is also an accredited cancer center and provides cancer services to a wider population. In addition to the main hospital site in Northampton, the Trust provides outpatient and day surgery services in neighboring communities. <https://www.northamptongeneral.nhs.uk/Home.aspx>

About the Pathway to Excellence® Program

The Pathway to Excellence® Program recognizes a healthcare organization's commitment to creating a positive nursing practice environment. The Pathway to Excellence in Long Term Care® program is the first to recognize this type of supportive work setting specifically in long-term care facilities. Pathway organizations focus on collaboration, career development, and accountable leadership to empower staff. www.nursecredentialing.org/pathway

About ANCC

The mission of the [American Nurses Credentialing Center](http://www.nursecredentialing.org) (ANCC), a subsidiary of the American Nurses Association, is to promote excellence in nursing and healthcare globally through

credentialing programs. ANCC's internationally renowned credentialing programs certify and recognize individual nurses in specialty practice areas. ANCC recognizes healthcare organizations that promote nursing excellence and quality patient outcomes while providing safe, positive work environments. In addition, ANCC accredits healthcare organizations that provide and approve continuing nursing education and accredits transition to practice programs and prepares nurses for new practice roles. For more information about ANCC, visit us at nursingworld.org/ancc and follow us on [Twitter](#). ANCC is the only nurse credentialing organization to successfully achieve ISO 9001:2015 certification.