

Challenges for the future of Renal Nurse Education in a regional renal centre

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Within the renal nursing team in our organisation we face increasing challenges with staffing, with experienced staff retiring and issues with nurse recruitment and retention. Like other specialist units, we recognise the requirement of a highly skilled, well-trained, highly motivated and fully engaged workforce. The current financial climate can make change management difficult and sometimes seem impossible.

We developed a five year forward-thinking plan; this strategy was developed with both local and national context. This vision will inform how we develop, train, motivate and retain our nursing team whilst delivering safe, high quality, patient-centred care.

We distributed an education questionnaire to all renal nursing staff. Through our discussions, the need for a more structured format of renal nurse training and education became apparent. We recognised a need to support renal nurse development and decided to conduct an educational questionnaire. Questionnaires included 9 multiple choice questions and were distributed to Registered Nurses, Assistant Practitioners and Health Care Assistants across the renal department, with a 50% return.

There were common themes emerging with clinical areas (renal ward and dialysis unit) facing different challenges. The renal unit staff highlighted time as a huge factor, as well as location of the training, as leaving the unit was often difficult. They favoured online rather than simulation (SIM) training. In contrast, the ward team felt a full study day would be better attended rather than several shorter sessions. Staff also fed back that making sessions mandatory would ensure staff attended. It was clear that both areas agreed on what drives development: patient safety, clinical skills and NMC requirement. The feedback highlighted that one model of training doesn't fit all.

The results were presented to the department and a subgroup of senior nurses went on to formulate a training programme. This included SIM training, mandatory renal nurse on-site study days and a 24 month competency-based training programme that would include vascular access, anaemia, transplantation, haemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis competencies.

In addition, we developed a dedicated hub area where clinical skills such as cannulation, aseptic technique and emergency scenarios could be practiced. We felt the key to success was increased staff engagement, so a link nurse from each clinical area was identified to ensure effective communication, attendance and support. It has been crucial to engage ward managers so time could be allocated, in addition to the impact on staff development reviews and NMC revalidation.

We are developing a structured training programme for junior nurses to improve knowledge, retention and recruitment. We hope this will lead to improved training for experienced nurse leaders, who balance leadership roles and clinical commitments. This programme includes specialist training, utilising skills and experience already in the team. The primary ethos is collaborative working, replacing the current practice of doing great work in isolation. We believe this will lead to better renal nurse training and investment in the renal department.