

## CASE STUDY

University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

# NHS Professionals successfully launches new flexible support worker role

- ✓ Four cohorts totalling 52 flexible support workers (FSWs) delivered
- ✓ 15,000 additional hours of care delivered
- ✓ FSW role now a permanent fixture at the Trust

### The Situation

Starting in December 2020, NHS Professionals implemented a brand new support staff group into University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust to support with patient experience during the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trust required a pool of staff who could adapt and support essential healthcare services to continue as smoothly as possible.

January 2024



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“ Working in the NHS has always been a dream of mine. As a flexible support worker, I was able to support both my ward-based colleagues and also patients – it also gave me the skills to undertake my healthcare assistant training. I enjoy what I do and I have received many compliments from patients and visitors. I recommend the FSW role to anyone who may be thinking about it – the job was amazing and the flexibility makes a big difference. ”

**Marie Pluckrose,**  
Flexible Support Worker at NHS Professionals



### The Solution

We used our Healthcare Support Worker Development Programme to create a bespoke flexible support worker role to assist with ward management, family communication, maintaining hygiene and general tasks. It was to improve patient experience and outcomes during the dynamic challenges of the pandemic, including strict quarantines.

The role provided valuable additional support to clinical staff and their patients by taking on a wide range of essential duties. Examples of these included: administrative tasks, transporting patients, restocking medical supplies, running errands, maintaining hygiene on wards and assisting with patients' non-medical needs such as helping them get to the bathroom or become more comfortable in bed.

We worked closely with our clinical governance team to create a fast-track training process to onboard FSWs quickly in a compliant way within the rapidly developing pandemic environment.

### The Result

Our FSWs not only freed up time for substantive staff to dedicate to other duties during the pandemic, they also fostered positive relationships with patients and their families during this very challenging time. One example of this was helping patients with video calls so they could stay in touch with family during visitation restrictions and supporting vulnerable patients with additional needs.

Although the FSW role was developed to meet the unique demands of the pandemic, it proved so successful that it evolved to meet longer term priorities and it is now a permanent fixture at the Trust. An added benefit is that the FSW role is providing an alternative entry-level pathway into an NHS career for people passionate about caring for others.

As of July 2023, the Trust had taken on four FSW cohorts, totalling 52 new Bank Members. Together they have provided over 15,000 hours of additional ward-based care and support.

The FSWs are deployed where they are needed most, across a range of ward locations with different tasks depending on day-to-day operational priorities.

“ NHS Professionals quickly adapted and responded to the needs of the Trust with the implementation of the flexible support workers, recruiting over 50 new Bank Members into our organisation via this route. The role has proved invaluable on many of our wards and has remained in an ongoing capacity. Many FSWs use it as a stepping stone into their career in care, or here at UHP progressing into a full healthcare assistant position. This is just one of many examples of our continuing partnership approach between NHS Professionals and UHP providing agile resource, which has a positive impact on patient care. ”

**Karen Launder,** Head of Resourcing & Retention,  
University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

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