

Problem Solving and Decision Making in the workplace.

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Introduction

Within every place of work there are always a number of ongoing issues. These can be within the company; either with the employer, employees or through outside forces such as the government who in this specific problem that I will be analysing, controls the budget of the NHS or things associated with helping citizens.

Throughout this report I will be bringing to light a problem that can be found in my chosen field of work, that had become an even greater problem in the pandemic. Through the course of this report, you will find that I'll be suggesting ways in which this problem can be resolved in the future.

Problem at Workplace

The shortage of staff and heavy workloads has been an issue that I have found to be a continuous problem within Healthcare, which is the field of work I specialise in. There are various elements that could be the potential causes of this problem such as the Covid-19 virus' effect, staff leaving due to low job satisfaction, Stress and much more.

There are not many advantages when looking at the shortage in staff and heavy workloads within the NHS but, there are a number of disadvantages which this problem has caused not only within the NHS but with employees, the public and the government.

Below, you will find a more detailed understanding of how the shortage of staff and heavy workloads has negatively impacted my place of work.

1. Shortage of staff has been a major problem within the healthcare sector, which had become an even greater issue within the pandemic. During the period of time where there were major restrictions in the UK due to worldwide various named Covid 19 the shortness of staffing had increased at an alarming rate.

Covid- 19 had affected my place of work so much so, that we could visually see that the ratio of patients to members of staff in the NHS was reaching a point of becoming out of control. This was very worrying and made the ever-increasing workload very difficult to complete.

This issue began to bring great concern and stress to myself, as well as to a lot of my colleagues at work because the number of registered nurses was decreasing in comparison to number of patients who were increasing as a very fast pace. This issue had pushed the NHS to employ large numbers of support staff which are considered as nursing and healthcare assistants, this was so workers such as registered nurses didn't feel as much pressure.

The use of support staff helped the NHS to an extent but, still made it very difficult for a lot of members of staff at work because most of work in healthcare requires staff with the necessary qualifications, education and experience in order to carry out a number of important tasks to patients which meant there was now a lot more pressure on registered nurses as yes we had healthcare assistants around us but there was a lot of work that healthcare assistants cannot complete due to their experience level, which means that we (the registered staff) still had a lot of additional work to carry out which was very worrying as it increased "the likelihood of a patient dying by 7%" (1).

Healthcare is a very fast paced career, it requires you to think very abruptly on your toes as your duty of care is to attend to service users as soon as possible. With staff shortage and increased workloads it made fast paced work extremely difficult to complete at times.

Research in fact shows that “low nurse staffing levels were associated with higher rates of falls and deaths” (2) this piece of information is honestly very shocking but is very understandable as covid -9 came to the world so abruptly & without any warning, thus causing many not to understand the extent of damage this virus could cause which meant hospitals were filling up at high-speed capacities.

2. The Shortage of staffing and heavy workloads within my place of work can cause huge amounts of stress among employees. I have personally experienced this myself at work due to the high demand of work which has been required from me. Research shows that “Studies conducted on nurses and health care providers show that a heavy workload increases the potential for medical errors” (3). “Shortages of staff risk longer waiting lists, declining care quality and new NHS money going unspent” (4). These piece of information shows that heavy workloads due to staff shortage is very dangerous as this can also put patients at risk of not receiving the appropriate care needed. This can lead to both the NHS and the government unable to provide appropriate levels of medical equipment such as PPE and patients could essentially sue for not receiving appropriate form of care.

As a healthcare worker, one of my key duties of care is catering to the specific needs of patients, this can be a very difficult task as some patients can be very impatient, demanding and in some cases very aggressive at times, this ranges from the individuals I have come across. This can also add to the stress as a patient’s behaviour unintentionally adds to the workload that is demanded from staff causing a lot of pressure which can make a member of staff feel physically & mentally very fatigued.

3. The heavy workload which is required from staff due to staff shortage can have a detrimental effect on our organisation at work which can be a cause of lack of motivation, making it even more difficult to complete even the simplest tasks.

Lack of motivation will naturally cause conflict between members of staff as pressure of the work starts to pile up on the individual causing individuals to become frustrated at work. Research does state that “Most of this pressure comes from staff themselves (92%), rather than from managers (26%) or other colleagues (20%)” (5). With all of these issues the whole company is being affected as members of staff level of performance decreases leading to an impact on the public who are the patients, this then becomes an ongoing cycle.

4. Overtime is the last point I would like to state that effects work. Especially within the pandemic which I believe is a major factor which caused this problem to heighten. With the shortage of staff and heavy workloads within the pandemic, members of staff had found themselves working overtime in order to cater to the needs of patients. This made work very difficult as staff were physically & mentally exhausted.

Research shows that “Staff report being satisfied with the opportunities to work flexibly – but 59% are, on average, working additional unpaid hours each week. Overall, the proportion of staff working additional hours is 72%, indicating that not enough has been done to alleviate workloads in light of similar results in recent years” (6).

Heavy workloads can also mean doing overtime in some cases. As seen from the context above some staff do not get paid for the extra workloads that they complete which is out of their working hours schedule, this information is alarming and needs to be resolved quickly.

The Stakeholders

Before stating the possible ways to identify and overcome this problem at work, I will be identifying the impact in which the shortage of staff and heavy workloads have on all the stakeholders.

Based on the purpose of this discussion I would define a stakeholder as those who are involved in the healthcare system and who would be significantly affected by reforms to the system. There are a couple major stakeholders in the healthcare system that can be possibly affected by the problem which this report is based around. These stakeholders are the government, patients, employers and insurance companies.

The government is a major stakeholder in healthcare as the government helps with the financial health of the organisation, which in this case, is the NHS. The government also helps formulate the legislations which are used as a guidance of the decision making and actions of the organisation.

Patients are very important stakeholders as they are the service users receiving the care from healthcare providers. Patients are also very major stakeholders as they have personal rights and responsibility when receiving care.

Employers are major stakeholders as they play a big role within healthcare as their role is to hire the healthcare providers so they can carry out the appropriate care for service users.

Insurance companies are major stakeholders in healthcare as they sell health coverage plans directly to patients, or through the company via the employers which in this case will be to the doctors who in most cases after diagnosing the patient would give to registered staff to then help medicate patients.

We have acknowledged that the problem at work is the shortage in staff and heavy workloads, after acknowledgment the next step a company and the employer of the company should do is then begin to suggest ways in which they can identify the problem at work quicker before it has become an even bigger issue.

One way in which the NHS can identify the shortage in staff and heavy workloads in future is by comparing stats through the use of the NHS Digital workforce data, this piece of data is used to show a range of different figures of the "workload of an employed person and allows for the total workforce workload to be expressed in an equivalent number of full-time staff" (7).

Currently on the NHS digital workforce data, it shows figures from the month of September 2020 which could be used as useful pieces of information that can possibly help identify the issue of shortage in staff and heavy workload.

Through my research I also found out a very interesting piece of information which basically states that in the month of September 2019 to the month of September 2020 there has been a 4.6% rise in workload for the employed staff within the NHS. With information such as this the NHS could use this and compare information with the workload of the employed in 2021 to see if the problem has increased or decreased and with concluded outcomes, can possibly hold conference meetings in order to tackle the issue in a more effective way.

How to overcome this problem?

A way in which this problem could be decreased is with the help of the government and the NHS who have the authority help eliminate this issue. One thing that I would suggest is for both parties to come together and suggest a possible national workforce strategy to tackle

staffing shortage and heavy workloads head on. "We need to avoid creating a long, undeliverable wish list and we must give attention to the whole NHS team and the vital social care workforce" (8). Just as the statement said by Jon Restell who is a MIP Chief executive has stated, my personal opinion is when the government and NHS hold conference meetings it should not be yet another meeting but one that is effective to potentially change the work of the NHS employees for the better as this issue does not only have an effect on employees, but it also has a major impact on all stakeholders involved.

7 Steps to Problem Solving

Step 1 - Identifying the Problem

The first step in problem solving is identifying and acknowledging the issue. How do you do this? You identify the issue by first asking yourself what the problem is. When identifying a problem, you need to also understand that there could be other potential sources that could have caused this problem, so you need to be able to identify those issues as well and then find the best solution to tackle the problem.

Step 2 - Defining Goals

This is the step after you have understood the problem and the causes of the problem and from this you know begin to establish goals. The goals that you will make need to be realistic, they also need to be achievable and very specific in order to solve the problem.

Step 3 - Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a very important step in problem solving and specifically comes after you have established the goals that you will be aiming to achieve in order to tackle this problem. Brainstorming is the step where you think of possible ways to resolve the issue.

Step 4 - Assessing Alternatives

Assessing alternatives is where you look back at the previous steps which are identifying the problem, defining goals and brainstorming and you conclude the negative and positive outcomes which each step could possibly give.

Step 5 - Choosing the Solution

This is the step where you would choose the best appropriate solution that the steps you have taken could possibly lead to.

Step 6 - Execution

The execution stage is the stage where you begin to conclude and your solution and now begin to think how you will finally execute this plan

Step 7 - Evaluation

Evaluation is the last step in the problem solving. To evaluate is to help you to understand and examine your overall plan, this stage is very important as you evaluate the effectiveness of your plan which in this stage you also make small adjustment in order to see the best outcome.

Decision Making

There are various decisions that could possibly be made in order to help decrease this problem that is not only affecting the employees at work such as:

In regard to the problem with the shortage of staff the NHS could put out more vacancies on more job sites in order to bring new members of staff. This should not just be for individuals with experience, but the NHS should be more open to employing entry level staff and provide high quality training in order for individuals to carry out more complex tasks which an assigned experienced member of staff will be able to do. This will help lower staff shortage and also help tackle staff having to withstand heavy workloads.

Members of staff could also make the decision in helping to motivate one and other. One thing that I have noticed at my place of work is that when employees are highly engaged, they are more likely to perform positively, be more attentive to detail, think creatively and innovate at work which will cause positive growth at work. "According to one Gallup survey, 59% of engaged employees, against just 3% of disengaged employees, said that their job brought out their most creative ideas" (9).

The government along with NHS representatives should possibly decide to conduct a conference meeting to discuss ways in which they could help ease the pressure of staff in an effective way so that staff can deliver high quality care. Because if there is a staff shortage and heavy workloads, staff will not perform to their best due to stress and high demand work which will decrease job satisfaction which will in turn lead to employees leaving.

If employees are given an overload of work which is causing them to work overtime, which just as stated earlier within this report showed that in some cases members of staff could possibly not even get paid for those extra hours staff are able to file a complaint to an employment tribunal under the **Employment Rights Act 1996 (NHS Recruitment – Protected Disclosure) Regulations 2018** which specifically states:

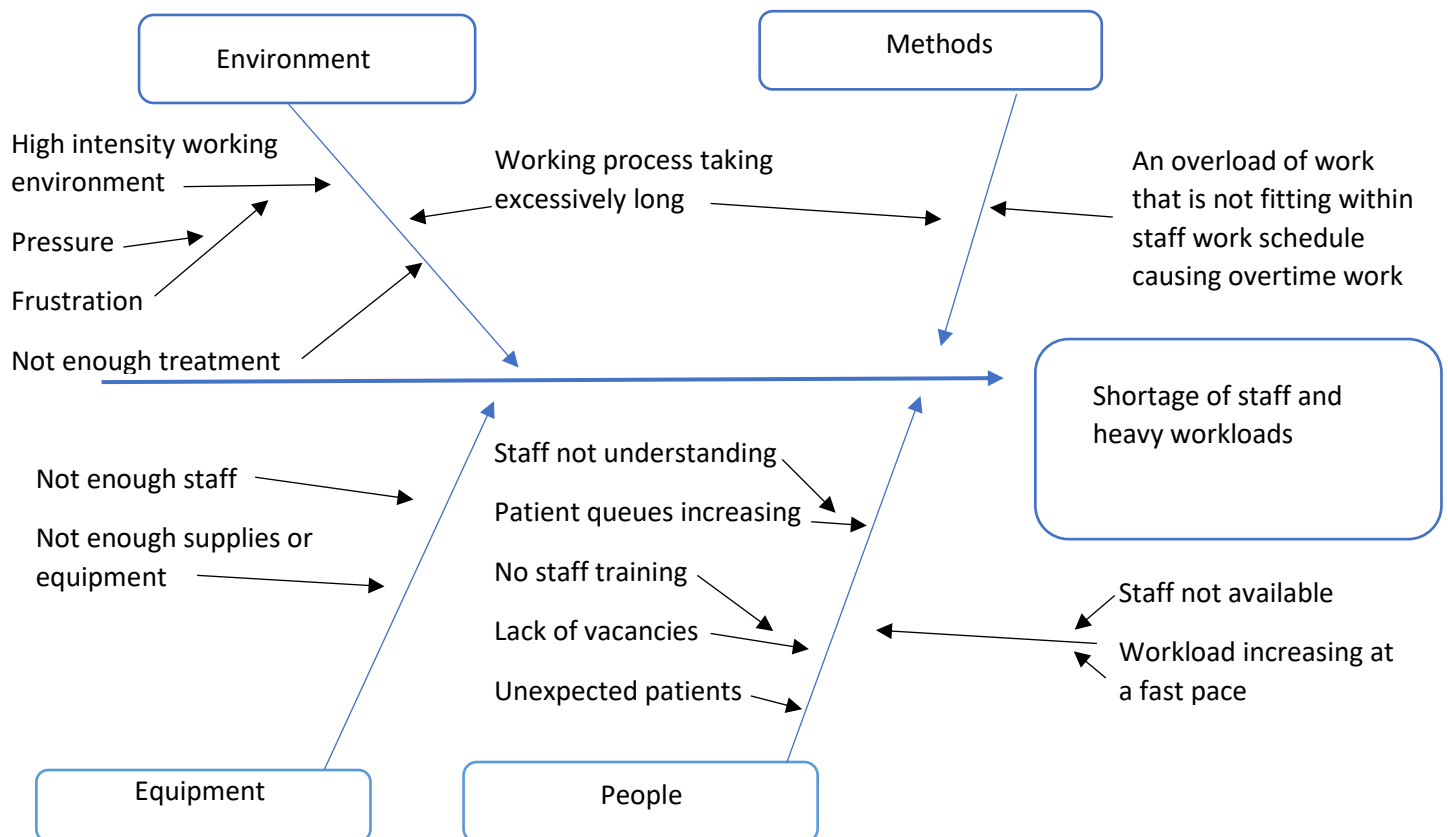
"An applicant has a right of complaint to an employment tribunal against an NHS employer if the NHS employer contravenes regulation 3. If there are facts from which the employment tribunal could decide, in the absence of any other explanation, that an NHS employer contravened regulation 3, the tribunal must find that such a contravention occurred unless the NHS employer shows that it did not contravene regulation 3".(10)

To ensure this does not happen, I believe that a conference meeting should be something the government and representatives of the NHS should consider as reports and court cases will mean money will have to be produced by the organisation towards these cases, thus, possibly causing even more potential funding issue within the NHS.

Fishbone Analysis

The fishbone analysis is based on cause and effect. The use of fishbone helps you to analyse any underlying factors that could be the cause of the problem, this will then help you to come up with effective solutions in order to tackle the problem. You can also use this tool when you are trying to understand why a particular problem is occurring helping you to have a better understanding of the issue.

The diagram below is my interpretation of a fishbone analysis where I have stated the main problem as shortage of staff and heavy workloads.



SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The SWOT analysis is a very useful, commonly used technique which assess these four attributes that play crucial roles in an organization.

The diagram I have produced below states the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that could be faced at my place of work due to the shortage of staffing and heavy workloads.

<u>STRENGTHS</u> • There are some highly skilled staff available to help. • Local charities willing to help ease the pressure off members of staff	<u>WEAKNESSES</u> • Assigned members of staff not being available to meet patients as often enough. • Not enough staff at work • Staff not clear of the work they should complete due work overload.
<u>OPPORTUNITIES</u> • A supportive working community • Supportive staff who can help members of staff deliver quality care	<u>THREATS</u> • Funding from the government • Skill shortage • Lack of training for healthcare assistants

Solution

One recommendation I would propose to the NHS would possibly be to offer altered schedules to accommodate the personal and professional needs of members of staff.

For example, there are health care workers who are parents who would want to spend as much time as possible with their children, especially within the pandemic was not as possible due to high demand work required from those members of staff. Most of the time hospitals are very busy, maybe the NHS could possibly give parents a schedule that can work around a time where they could also spend enough time with their children? For example, offering them alternative shifts to work around this will also lower stress levels making it easier for staff to deliver higher quality care at work.

One other solution I would recommend to the organisation as well as to the government would be to invest in long-term training and professional development. This would be of great benefit to both the assigned staff as well as health care assistants making the issue of staff shortage decrease due to there being available staff with the appropriate training. With this there will be more employees able to complete complex task, without relying on the very few highly trained staff, in turn meaning the issue of heavy workloads would decrease by a lot making it a healthier and enjoyable place to work.

Conclusion

In conclusion to finalising this report I have understood that with every problem there is always a possible solution.

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