Project Whittington: GOSH nursing volunteering for the general paeds ward NCL

Following the first surge of Covid plans were changed for the general paediatric service in NCL south. All general paediatrics are to be sited at the Whittington Hospital, combining the units of the Whittington, Royal Free and UCLH. The first surge saw general paediatrics hosted at Great Ormond Street, which, although successful was not ideal for the patients as they needed to be transferred from any NCL South A&E to GOSH. For the second surge, the Whittington is the only specialist paediatric A&E so is ideally placed to take general paediatric patients. Beds have increased on site and to staff the extra beds, volunteers have been recruited from other paediatric wards in NCL South. The ask from Great Ormond Street Hospital was for 20 nurses. GOSH nurses found looking after general paediatric patients very different to what they were used to. Many enjoyed the experience and this was reflected in the volunteers who came forward.

Criteria and Recruitment

For the nurses to be useful we needed applicants who were IV competent and had already completed at least one year of the graduate programme. We were asking for band 5 and 6 nurses to apply and the only limitation was that they should not be working in either Theatres or intensive care. Screen savers and general emails did not yield many candidates. However, targeted emails to nurses planning to go on the LSBU High Dependency course led to an increase in interest.

To date we have recruited 17. Unfortunately more applied but they could not be released by their ward manager due to staffing numbers and the quick turnaround. Of the volunteers, there was one band 7 educator, 4 band 6 nurses and the rest at band 5.

Preparation

All the volunteers were given a Zoom preparation session involving getting to know each other, an introduction to the Whittington and to general paediatrics. Refresher sessions were done on A – E assessment and sepsis. GOSH was fortunate to have the nursing guidelines for the Whittington on the Covid hub and staff were directed to read them for the most common conditions. One of the Practice Educators who worked on the general paeds ward during the first surge also did a session on how she found the experience and the types of patients they saw on the ward. One type of patient new to GOSH was the acute mental health patient and a session was included from the mental health PE.

The Whittington offered a visit with the matron and 6 of the staff took this up, accompanied by a manager from GOSH. They had a comprehensive tour of the hospital and of the ward area they will be working in. They also had an induction day and a supernumerary shift.

Support

As well as sending staff nurses, a practice educator was also seconded to the Whittington for the period for two shifts a week. Additionally a manager will go up to the Whittington as a minimum fortnightly. The head of NWF has also run a Zoom to discuss any issues.