

Creating a bank of locum general practice nurses

Providing cover for general practice nurses (GPNs) who are on annual leave, sick leave or study leave can be immensely problematic and can seriously disrupt patient care. It is therefore strongly advisable to develop systems that can be used across practices to provide cover.

Examples of schemes are detailed below:

Torbay primary care trust (PCT)

A simple scheme is adopted whereby all GPNs employed across the PCT provide an availability sheet to work additional hours on a locum arrangement additional to their hours in the practice. A disclaimer is applied advising practice managers to check the credentials of these staff independently for their own protection.

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Liverpool City PCTs

Liverpool PCTs found that individual general practices and the practice nurse development team (PNDT) had identified a need for a PCT general practice nursing locum service. The PNDT often received requests to cover nursing sessions in general practice at short notice, which could not be easily met. The result was inconvenience to patients, as appointments had to be cancelled. In addition, nurses were often volunteering to undertake additional hours for the PCT.

The development of a PCT-wide, bank service, whereby GPNs are employed by the PCT, but 'loaned out' to practices on a semi-permanent basis, led to a review of how to provide additional support with locum nurses for general practice. Although using a slightly different title, the GPN locum service is an integral part of the PCT nurse bank.

Special needs of general practice

Specific consideration of the employment relationship between general practice and the PCT needed to be considered in the provision of locum services – the PCT contracts staff to another organisation (ie the general practice) whilst retaining vicarious liability for the nurse. In addition, the nurse is unlikely to work in their substantive post for the PCT. This is different from other nursing services where the responsibility for the provision of services and vicarious responsibility both sit with the PCT.

Aims of the GPN locum service

- To provide a resource for general practices who may require short-term nursing cover
- To ensure that any short-term nursing support is delivered to an appropriate standard by appropriately trained nurses

Service provision

The model of service provision for the GPN locum service considers:

- *recruitment and employer responsibilities*
- *process of providing nurses to general practice.*

Recruitment and employer responsibilities

Recruitment

The recruitment of nurses wishing to work as a locum practice nurse will follow the PCT policy for all nurses joining the nurse bank. This includes:

- *completed application form*
- *assessment of application against job description*
- *short-listing interview with assessment of competences*
- *references and criminal record bureau clearance.*

Assessment of practice

The assessment of a GPN's ability to work unsupported in general practice will be carried out through a short, structured, induction programme. During this programme they are expected to work in a supervised capacity alongside a senior nurse from the PNDD, who will assess their:

- *consultation skills*
- *knowledge base*
- *ability to undertake tasks*
- *documentation skills*
- *knowledge of trust policies and procedures.*

Following this assessment, the nurse will or will not be accepted to work on the locum service. The assessor will take professional responsibility for signing a nurse as competent to work within this service. Professional accountability will lie with the PNDD leader.

Nurses accepted will be given a '0' hours contract with the PCT. This contract enables any hours to be paid without the need for a fixed number of hours per month.

Demonstrating ongoing competence

The nurse working on the locum service will be expected to demonstrate ongoing competence through:

- *yearly review of own professional portfolio*
- *participation in clinical supervision*
- *demonstration of having met mandatory training requirements.*

Process of providing nurses to general practice

An experienced administrator within the PCT will administer the process of providing a nurse locum service.

Database

Having identified suitable nurses for the locum service, an active register will be maintained, including the following information:

- *nurse details*
- *contact number*
- *Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registration details*
- *skills*
- *potential availability.*

These details will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Requests for support

Requests for the practice nurse locum service may initially be taken by phone; however, they will be requested to confirm details by fax or email. The proforma will identify:

- *practice name*
- *contact details*
- *name of individual making the request*
- *nursing hours required*
- *level of nurse (eg Band 5 or Band 6).*

On receipt of the proforma, nurses on the database will be contacted to try to identify cover. Once a nurse has been identified as appropriate and willing to cover, details will be forwarded to the general practice of the:

- *nurse's name*
- *qualifications*
- *expectations of role*
- *cost for cover of the requested sessions.**

*Costs of the service per hour will include a percentage of the PCT administration costs. Details of the cost per hour plus the expectations of the nurse's role will be forwarded to all general practices on commencement of this service. In order to facilitate this process, general practices will be expected to allow 1 working day for requests for support to be actioned. Details of the general practice will be forwarded to the nurse.

On completion of the agreed sessions, the general practice will be invoiced for the amount agreed.

Nurse payments

All nurses are required to complete an 'additional hours' form on a monthly basis. This is forwarded to and verified by the administrator who will authorise payroll.

Governance issues

Clinical

Any clinical incident involving a nurse is actioned as per PCT policy and procedures. All nurses are made aware of this process at induction. Other clinical issues raised by nursing staff are dealt with as per the PCT human resources (HR) policies.

Financial

The payment of invoices is managed within the PCT's financial systems.

Data protection

All nurse information is held on an appropriate secure database, with limited access. The database conforms to data protection requirements. Contact Lynda Carey for more details: Lynda.Carey@centralliverpool.nhs.uk.