

CONSULTANT RECRUITMENT WITHIN NHS LANARKSHIRE

Background

Recruitment to consultant posts is seen to be problematic in Lanarkshire. There is a vacancy rate of 16% against a Scottish average of 8%. There are a number of factors that effect the recruitment to senior medical and dental posts within NHS Lanarkshire which include the following:

- The Deanery has confirmed that approximately 8% of students move south of the border after their first year in post. Statistics have proved that Dundee and Edinburgh attract a lot of students from south of the border who historically return home after their 5 year training is complete.
- NHS Lanarkshire is the third largest Board in Scotland. However it often competes with the 2 larger Teaching Boards, Edinburgh and Glasgow where many local candidates prefer to apply. Candidates who are attracted to rural settings are drawn to Borders, Dumfries and Highland.
- The size and resources of small departments can be a major drawback when recruiting to senior vacancies. Often SpRs are drawn to specialist units where resources are concentrated, support is available, team working is effective and opportunities exist for sub-specialisation.
- There are recognized “shortages” throughout Scotland that all Boards have difficulty recruiting to e.g. Histopathology.

Consultant Expansion

The consultant establishment within NHS Lanarkshire has increased over recent years and although some of these new posts remain vacant at present, increases in the establishment have risen for several reasons namely:

1. The impact of the European Working Time Directive and the need to reduce working hours.
2. The New Deal for junior doctors which has seen a change to the ways in which hospital doctors work.
3. New Mental Health Care and Treatment Act which came into effect and added to the demands on Psychiatry services.
4. Modernising Medical Careers which will change the way in which junior medical staff are trained and will reduce their input to service provision.

The following table summarises the vacancy position (headcount) for Consultant staff within NHS Lanarkshire over the last two financial years.

April 2004 – March 2005

No of Leavers	No of New posts	No of Posts filled	No of Vacancies at year end
16	10	16	54

April 2005 – March 2006

No of Leavers	No of New posts	No of Posts filled	No of Vacancies at year end
19	6	36	43

In summary, therefore, during the financial year 2005/06, **19** Consultants have left NHS Lanarkshire’s employment either due to retiral or taking up new appointments. NHS Lanarkshire was successful in recruiting to **36** Consultant posts in various specialties; however, this still resulted in **43** Consultant vacancies at the year end. In the previous financial year for 2004/05 NHS Lanarkshire were successful in filling **16** posts but lost a total of **16** posts to retrials and individuals moving to other Boards. This resulted in **54** vacancies at the year end. Not all new posts were recruited to.

A considerable amount of effort has been and continues to be put into filling Consultant vacancies. Existing staff often contribute to bridging the gaps within the service, although this is limited as they simultaneously have to meet the demands of their own role. The redesign and concentration of services have contributed greatly to aid recruitment and retention of Consultant staff particularly within the Children’s Services and Urology specialties that are now able to recruit to their Consultant vacancies. Further information is contained within the Redesign section.

One of the focuses of role redesign is tackling staff shortages. This involves expanding the depth and breadth of roles, creating new jobs or moving tasks up or down a traditional uni-disciplinary ladder. Areas such as the Hospital at Night have redesigned the specialist nurse input that supports the medical staff who lead the team. NHS Lanarkshire was the first Board in Scotland to introduce these teams. NHS Lanarkshire is also participating in the national pilot schemes to implement new roles for Physician’s Assistants and Anaesthetic Care Practitioners.

Recruitment Initiatives

Consultant recruitment is an extremely complex business and NHS Lanarkshire must abide by strict rules set down within the Statutory Instrument. Posts must be advertised in at least 2 national journals and more often we have to use our own networks to determine when candidates are available. When posts become vacant, locum adverts generally run prior to or simultaneously with the advertisement for the substantive post. A considerable amount of effort is put into filling Senior Medical Staff vacancies and several initiatives have been tested over the last few years. These are specifically:

- Recruitment drives are underway via world wide journals. The BMJ internet and our own local intranet are utilized in an attempt to obtain suitably qualified/experienced candidates for a variety of specialties.
- A Medical Workforce Group within the former Primary Care Division set out an active recruitment programme for Psychiatry in 2002. This involved all current consultants acting as “Recruitment Agents”, which included proactive contact with potential candidates and significant flexibility around job descriptions. At the start of the process there were 15.6 whole-time equivalent vacant consultant posts in an establishment of 38.7 whole-time equivalent. By August 2004 the situation had altered to having 5.9 whole-time equivalent vacancies in an expanded establishment of 43.5 whole-time equivalent posts, unfortunately some consultants have departed since then and the process of active recruitment is ongoing.
- Consultant Radiology cover from South Africa is in place. This involves a fixed term contract with a series of experienced Radiologists who undertake work within both Monklands and Wishaw Hospitals.
- The Acute Division invested in a website specifically to target Histopathology. The site was fully developed in conjunction with the Histopathologists within NHS Lanarkshire. A substantive appointment has been made along with a long term locum via this website. It is hoped that this will lead to a further permanent appointment.
- Assistance was received from the Scottish Executive to help NHS Lanarkshire recruit to the Consultant Expansion Programme. The financial assistance aided the recruitment of 2 Consultant Radiologists, 6 Consultant Anaesthetists and 4 Staff Grade Anaesthetists via Bluecare Medical Agency. These consultants are contracted on an initially fixed-term basis during which time assessments will take place and following which, if the candidates are suitable, a substantive post will be advertised and interviewed for in the normal way. It is hoped that this money will also assist NHS Lanarkshire in making proleptic appointments and facilitate relocation expenses where necessary.

Impact of Redesign

Concentration of services has successfully helped NHS Lanarkshire attract Consultants to specialties that have proved difficult to recruit to. Two Consultant Urologists were recruited to long term vacancies only when the concentration of the in-patient service onto a single site was agreed. There was also difficulty in recruiting to Consultant, Staff Grade and junior medical vacancies within the Children's Services specialty. Following centralisation of in-patients in 2002, Children's Services has appointed 4 Consultants and 3 Staff Grades. There is no longer any shortage of applications for their junior medical staff. This in turn has led to an expansion of the medical establishment with 6 new Consultant posts being created within the specialty since its services were concentrated, 4 of which have been filled.

Haematology has also been a difficult specialty to recruit to for NHS Lanarkshire. However with the agreement that this specialty will centralise in-patient facilities on a single site, NHS Lanarkshire after receiving several very good applications have successfully recruited to two Consultant Haematology vacancies.

Despite the best endeavors of NHS Lanarkshire they remain the Board with the highest vacancy rate for Consultants. There are many reasons, most of which have been mentioned above. NHS Lanarkshire firmly believes that the changes envisaged in a Picture of Health will go a long way to resolve this problem.