NHS Trust

Two NHS Trusts underwent a merger, which was followed by a long-term period of rationalisation/restructuring of services.

Problem

It was feared that this sustained period of change and uncertainty might undermine the morale and performance of staff. Poor management of change can lead to employees feeling anxious, eg about their employment status, new work responsibilities, new managers/work teams, new hours, working further from home or in a different environment. Where this happens it can lead to increased sickness absence, staff turnover, and people in work under-performing because they are under excessive pressure.

Assessing the risks and finding solutions

Following HSE guidance to avert the potential of stress during the change process, extra emphasis was placed on communication. The two Trusts committed themselves to openness with staff regarding the merger and subsequent restructuring, and introduced the following measures:

■ *Team briefing* – A monthly newsletter went out to all staff from the CEO, supported by verbal briefings from section/unit managers.

■ *Staff training* – Emphasising the importance of feedback to effective management.

■ *Staff hotline* – A 24-hour confidential service which staff could use to confidentially air their views on their working conditions. Feedback on issues raised was published on a weekly basis.

■ *Shared leadership* – The nursing directorate adopted the shared governance model, whereby decisions are made by a committee of staff from across the organisation and across grades. There are now nurse representatives on committees that manage the work of the directorate.

■ *Information exchange* – During the merger and restructuring period, the CEO held regular meetings with staff to answer questions about the Trust and its future.

■ *Social events* – Geared specifically towards encouraging a strong bond between staff from the two previously separate organisations.

Results

Overall sickness absence and staff turnover has remained stable despite the upheaval created by the merger and restructuring.

■ *If you are planning a major organisational change, staff are likely to be concerned about job security, possible relocation and changes to their job terms*

and conditions.

- *It is important that all new developments are communicated quickly and that staff are given the opportunity to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change.*
- *Even where change is inevitable, systems can be developed jointly to ensure that the process is managed smoothly and with minimal disruption.*
- *Shared responsibility for managing change, lead by staff of all levels and their representatives, can help to identify potential issues and take steps to address them.*