Abstracts

TAPPING INTO THE BENEFITS OF THE ASSISTANT PRACTITIONER

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Background Nationally, the current shortage of nurses is likely to increase, in part due to the cessation of student nurse and other healthcare student bursaries (Imison & Dayan, 2016). To address this workforce gap, organisations have re-evaluated the role of health care assistants (HCAs) and their potential to develop in the workplace (Skills for Health, 2015). Assistant Practitioners work at Band 4, with increased knowledge and skills developed to enable them to assess, analyse and support care needs beyond the traditional role of healthcare assistants (Skills for Health, 2015). Yet little is known if, and how, the Assistant Practitioners would aid the staffing shortfall.

Aims • To identify benefits of Assistant Practitioner role in a hospice setting.
• To successfully embed an Assistant Practitioner within the team.

Methods • A combined approach was used to capture relevant information, including:
• Case studies around Assistant Practitioners
• Current career development pathways and guidelines for Assistant practitioners
• Job descriptions compared
• Questionnaire generated and conducted within a hospice
• Clear job description and pathways created.

Results Benefits of an Assistant Practitioner were widely recognised particularly: greater ability to support and assist care; significance in increased work responsibilities; staff retention and career progression. Organisations adopted different ways to implement the Assistant Practitioner role demonstrating the diversity possible, including specialising in one area of work. Previous pitfalls centred on lack of communication about the role and responsibilities, acting as a barrier for staff acceptance. Our decision was appoint a new Assistant Practitioner with clear remit and responsibilities. Early benefits we are experiencing include:
• Supporting HCAs specifically with training and competencies
• Freeing specialist nurse time
• Bridging gap between staff grades.

Conclusion Assistant Practitioners can integrate into hospice teams, improving skill mix. Whilst the role continues to evolve, this generates exciting opportunities to develop and adapt work streams; early days but positive signs.