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Health Trust becomes an ambassador for healthy workplace

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is the first employer in South Tyneside to be awarded ambassador status under a scheme for improving the health and wellbeing of staff.

The Trust, which employs about 3,700 staff who work in hospital and community settings, had already achieved bronze, silver, gold, 'continuing excellence' and 'continuing excellence plus' in the North East Better Health at Work Awards.

As an ambassador, the Trust is seen as a role model for other organisations and can mentor them through the award process and support them by sharing good practice and ideas for engaging staff and improving their health and wellbeing.

Kath Griffin, the Trust's Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development, said: "Our staff are the heart of our organisation and it's really important that we do all we can to look after our teams in today's busy NHS.

"Our participation in the North East Better Health at Work Awards has helped us to focus on ways in which we can maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of our staff and I am delighted that the efforts of our wellbeing team have been recognised in this way.

"We know that there is a very clear and proven link which tells us that engaged staff who feel happy and motivated in their work have a positive impact on patient experience and outcomes and we are very much focused on looking after the health of our employees."

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust has a very active wellbeing team which takes a proactive approach to helping staff to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing at work.

Initiatives in place for NHS staff at the Trust include:

- Assessing those with musculoskeletal problems (conditions which affect the joints, bones and muscles) by carrying out workplace assessments and supporting staff to remain at, or return to, work in safely a timely manner
- Supporting staff with stress-related issues on an individual or team basis
- Promoting 'green travel' options, such as Bike to Work and Walk to Work schemes
- Offering health checks, smoking cessation and access to physical activities including pilates, boxercise, yoga



- Engaging staff by recruiting and supporting health champions who support the wellbeing agenda in their own work environment
- Delivering training to all levels of staff on a range of subjects, including understanding stress and managing stress in others

Healthy return to work for Stephanie

Stephanie Gordon, who is in her early 20s, is an administrative assistant with the Trust. Her job is predominantly office-based and involves spending long periods of time working at the computer. Stephanie identified that her lifestyle choices had changed significantly since starting work. She was eating a less healthy diet, snacking more and was less active and, as a result, her weight had increased.

Within a year of starting her job, Stephanie began to develop musculoskeletal pain in her lower back and dominant right wrist. The problem became so severe that she had to take a period of sickness absence to relieve the symptoms. Simple pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication had not improved her condition and the occupational health team referred her to the Trust's physiotherapist for some active treatment.

The physiotherapist carried out the prescribed treatment but, on talking to Stephanie, realised that she could be exposed to some work-related tasks, and had adopted lifestyle choices, that would put her at risk of developing a longer-term problem. He referred Stephanie into the Te@m (Talk, Eat @ Move) programme, which is in place to help staff with identified chronic health or lifestyle problems and risk factors that could lead to the development of those conditions.

Te@m aims to improve the health and wellbeing of staff to a point where they are able to function effectively and can remain at, or return to, work.

Stephanie attended her initial consultation where a full assessment (including medical history, current problems, diet and exercise preferences, pre-exercise screening, range of movement) was carried out. Following the assessment, Stephanie's goals were set and an individual plan was developed to help her achieve them. The aim was to improve her function and her general health and wellbeing so that she could return to work with a reduced risk of developing further problems.

Stephanie attended one-hour long Te@m sessions for six consecutive weeks. During the active sessions, an individual exercise plan was initiated and progressed, under the supervision of the wellbeing facilitator. At home, Stephanie carried out the prescribed exercises on a daily basis and also implemented the individual diet plan developed during her initial assessment.

Her condition improved so much that she returned to work during week four of the programme. On completion of it, Stephanie had full function and was pain-free. She had lost over a stone in weight and was adopting the healthier lifestyle choices around diet and exercise recommended by the wellbeing facilitator.

An assessment carried out before her return to work led to some changes to her workstation set-up and work pattern to reduce the risk of her symptoms returning.

Stephanie was subsequently reviewed by Te@m after three months and six months to ensure that she was maintaining her health and wellbeing goals, that she was functioning effectively and that her symptoms were controlled. She is currently well and at work.

Stephanie says: "I was moaning at myself because I knew I had to do something but it was having the support of the health and wellbeing team that gave me the push I needed. They are very knowledgeable and were always there with advice and they built up my confidence a lot. I am more active now and just happy to be able to enjoy my job."

ENDS



Pictured above: South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust wellbeing manager Clare Simpson with Stephanie Gordon

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Notes to editors:

About the Better Health at Work Awards

The North East Better Health at Work award (BHAW) is a regional award scheme which recognises and endorses workplaces that motivate workers in developing a sustainable culture of health and wellbeing. The award is a partnership between the NHS, the Association of North East Councils and the TUC and is open to all organisations regardless of business size or sector. Benefits of providing a healthy workplace include:

- Reduced absence due to ill health caused or made worse by work.
- Helping employees who have been ill to return to work.
- Improving work opportunities for people currently not in employment due to ill health or disability.
- Using the work environment to help people maintain or improve their health.