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Workplace wellbeing check put Sunderland nurse on the road to Team GB call-up

A workplace wellbeing check proved a wake-up call for Sunderland nurse Brendan Cassidy and now he is preparing to compete as part of Team GB in the European Duathlon Championships.

Mr Cassidy, who works with patients in the Southwick area as a community matron, visiting them in their own homes, discovered that he was overweight and that his blood pressure and cholesterol level were high when he had the free wellbeing check which South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust offers to all staff. The results led to him making substantial lifestyle changes, including dieting and taking up exercise. As a result, he is the fittest he has ever been and is delighted to have been selected for the duathlon in Ibiza in October 2018, which involves a 10k run, a 40k bike ride and another run of 5k.

Before going to work, he trains for two hours in the gym Mondays to Fridays. He also does weight training four times a week and goes for a long run or cycle ride at the weekend. Every Sunday, he prepares healthy meals for the week ahead for the

whole family – wife Lesley-Anne and children, Connor, eight, and Amber, five. He weighed 16st 7lb four years ago, now he is 12st 7lb.

Mr Cassidy, who lives in Sunderland, qualified as a nurse in 2003 and previously worked at Sunderland Royal Hospital, including as a ward manager, before joining South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust five years ago. He said: “I’m over the moon to have been selected for Team GB in the 35 to 40 age group and I can’t wait for the challenge of competing against athletes from all over Europe.

“I was a runner at school and I cycled and went to the gym when I was younger but, having a full-time job and a young family, I’d stopped exercising regularly and I was eating quite a lot of fast food. The wellbeing check came around the time when my dad had had a heart attack and my uncle was also having heart issues and it was a real ‘Eureka!’ moment for me. It made me think that I needed to do something for the sake of me and my family. I picked up cycling again and the more I cycled, the faster I got. I then started running and did my first marathon in 2014. A friend talked me into swimming and from then on I began taking part in triathlons. I now do several triathlons a year and have competed in an ironman event - a 2.4 mile swim in open water, a 112-mile time trial on the bike and a marathon.

“Hopefully, I’m setting a good example for my own kids and my patients in relation to the benefits of exercise and good nutrition and I’d like to think my story might give people the motivation to change their lives for the better.”

Wellbeing checks are just one element of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust’s proactive approach to helping its 3,600 staff working in hospital and in the community to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing. Its efforts were recognised in 2017 when the Trust became the first employer in South Tyneside to be awarded ‘Ambassador’ status in the North East Better Health at Work Awards and it has since achieved the awards’ highest level - Maintaining Excellence.

Other initiatives include:

- Carrying out workplace assessments to help staff with musculoskeletal problems (conditions which affect the joints, bones and muscles)

- Support for stress-related issues on an individual or team basis
- Promoting 'green travel' options, such as Bike to Work and Walk to Work schemes
- Offering smoking cessation and access to physical activities, including Pilates, Boxercise and Yoga
- Delivering training to all levels of staff on a range of subjects, including understanding and managing stress

Kath Griffin, the Trust's Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development, said: "As an employer, supporting and engaging our staff in improving their health and wellbeing is very important to the Trust and it is wonderful to see what Brendan has achieved following his workplace wellbeing check. He is an inspiration to his patients, his colleagues and to his community and we wish him every success when he competes for Team GB later this year. "

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's teams of community matrons in Sunderland and South Tyneside work with adults with complex, long-term conditions such as diabetes, respiratory disease and heart disease. Along with the patient, and their carers and relatives, they develop a personalised care plan, and they co-ordinate care with other health and social care professionals. This enables patients to stay in their own homes and helps to prevent unnecessary admission or attendance at hospital. Where patients do require hospital admission, the community matrons work with the wards to support discharge.

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Issued by **Kay Jordan**

For press enquiries on this release, contact **0191 404 1128** or email

kay.jordan@stft.nhs.uk