

## Exemplar Health Care's hands on approach to recruitment

Exemplar Health Care provides specialist nursing care for adults living with a range of complex and high acuity needs in 32 care homes across England. Early in March 2020, Exemplar Health Care teams took innovative and pioneering steps to respond to the coronavirus pandemic to ensure their workforce could weather the storm, whilst providing vital support to their service users.



**“Our associate carer role and our staffing prediction tool worked hand in hand to relieve workforce pressure throughout the pandemic. The associate carers provided invaluable support to existing frontline colleagues, ensuring they could focus on the most pressing and acute care needs, whilst our prediction tool allowed us to build a recruitment and agency pipeline to effectively meet our forthcoming staffing needs. This strategic approach has meant that we have supported our teams and service users well throughout the most challenging time on record.”**

**Russel Stephens**  
Recruitment Data, Analytics and Account Manager at Exemplar Healthcare

### Data driven preparation

Exemplar Health Care's in-house digital transformation team developed a number of staffing prediction tools, using historical data and up to date learnings as the pandemic evolved, to predict what their staffing needs might look like in the weeks and months ahead. This became a key tool, allowing the team to input information such as the current number of coronavirus cases which then predicted what future staff sickness levels could be, what the equipment needs might be and, as a result, what their recruitment pipeline and time to hire might need to look like to avoid staffing shortfalls and prepare as best they could.

The tool could also estimate attrition rate and, from Exemplar Health Care's recruitment pipeline, it could estimate how many people are going to convert and start with the business and how many people are likely to drop out in the process. The insight allowed them to dial up and quicken recruitment processes when needed, move ahead with normal recruiting or focus on other matters when the prediction model suggested they had the staff needed to cope with the challenges posed by the virus.

### Creation of an associate carer role

Exemplar Health Care created a new associate carer role, now named a 'health care assistant' to provide vital support to their frontline teams and service users. Depending on its size, each home would take in five to 10 associate carers with these new recruits shadowing existing carers to gain key skills and knowledge. Once they had a suitable level of knowledge, they started to carry out a number of key tasks to support carers, such as meeting service user's emotional and conversational needs, or simply playing games and interacting with service users.

This role also provided meaningful opportunities for individuals in the local community who had been furloughed from roles in the hospitality or tourism industries, giving them a ‘taste’ of how rewarding it is to work in the care sector. Many of these team members found their new roles so rewarding and fulfilling, they stayed on, completing the Care Certificate and pursuing a long-term career in care at Exemplar Health Care.

These initiatives have been such a success that Exemplar Health Care has made them a key part of their future contingency plans, meaning that, whenever the need arises, these initiatives can be resumed at pace.

## Training

Every colleague was provided with access to an enhanced digital learning platform to make sure they had the most up-to-date mandatory training. The goal was to make sure all colleagues felt confident in carrying out their roles, and had the information they needed, particularly as guidance changed throughout the pandemic. Utilising a mix of e-learning and virtual videos, followed by practical in-home support, Exemplar Health Care found this blended training approach provided teams with the knowledge and skills they needed to continue delivering great care to their service users. During 2020, Exemplar Health Care had around 600 colleagues who were successful in completing their Care Certificate through the bespoke online platform, with hundreds more completing it since.

This mix of enhanced training, recruitment and colleague support has allowed Exemplar Health Care to maintain a low sickness rate, after the first initial spike in March to May, and since then they have not exceeded a 10% level of sickness across the entire business. In fact, by July 2020, sickness rates had dropped below pre-COVID levels.

### Top tips



#### Think outside the box

In creating the associate carer role, Exemplar Health Care capitalised on the availability of furloughed workers, and those individuals who wanted to help the frontline. The initiative enabled existing care colleagues to be well supported and able to focus on what was most pressing, whilst the associate carers made sure service users were well supported, particularly given lockdown and self-isolation requirements, resulting in a win-win-win situation.



#### Plan along the way and constantly evolve

Exemplar Health Care’s methodical approach allowed them to capture learnings in real time and apply these to future scenarios, helping them gain some control over the unprecedented situation. Their approach of engaging with what they had learned and building on it going forward was key to their success.

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