

THE NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS WORKING GROUP REPORT

Why members?

'We want to hear you... Can you hear us?'

As a Foundation Trust, we aim to offer 'healthcare at its very best – with a personal touch!'. The outstanding quality and vast diversity of healthcare offered throughout the Newcastle Hospitals can certainly own the first part of this aim. This is coupled with a highly capable and dedicated workforce to support the second part of the aim. But as a Foundation Trust how are we different now – where does our membership fit into this and what difference does our membership make?

The concept in the Health Service Act of 2006 from that Government was clear - 'To make the providers of healthcare more directly accountable to the users of healthcare'. It has become increasingly clear that *membership engagement* is the key path to take to achieve this. Although a very difficult issue to tackle, it is vital to the ongoing success of Foundation Trusts. However as yet, no Trust seems to have found any one particular model by which to achieve this successfully.

A. MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

Membership numbers will always remain an important part of being a Foundation Trust. Indeed, it is a statutory requirement. Although we, ourselves set our target figures, they must be submitted to the Regulator. However, it has become increasingly clear and accepted by Foundation Trusts nationwide that rather than focussing on continually increasing the membership figures, it is probably more important to focus on really engaging with those who are already our members.

Membership figures currently stand at:

- Public = 5,778
- Staff = 3,268
- Total = 9,046

Except for a small increase last year following the two membership recruitment drives, these figures have remained fairly static throughout our time as a Foundation Trust. Numbers always decrease moderately when the data base is cleansed each year.

After much discussion both with the MCR group governors and with the Trust Chairman and Trust Secretary, it is proposed that any membership recruitment should be focused on patients, staff and volunteers associated with our hospitals and to focus on quality engagement with committed members. Membership figures will still be maintained however, at a minimum of 9,000 in total.

One of our original thoughts when setting the group up was to make being a member important and worthwhile, something people should be proud to be. This is much more likely to be achieved with this new focus as well as building and promoting the Trust's reputation and image.

We are currently updating the Membership Action Plan for 2012. This part of the programme will be designed with this focus in mind:

- to reach our more specific target audiences
- to positively promote and support the Trust; and
- to actively stimulate the Public, our staff, and governor interest in and engagement with the Trust.

B. MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

As a whole subject, membership engagement is still acknowledged as a very difficult issue to tackle. No one particular method has been found that can be modelled as successful, although various different initiatives are practised in different Trusts around the country.

We have been both using some of our own methods and ideas, as well as some of those suggested by other Trusts. In the new 2012 Action Plan, membership engagement will be the key focus and will therefore need considerable work to achieve the level of success to which we aspire. The MCR group is currently striving to shape this part of the new programme with the aims of:

- Promoting positive relationships and dialogue between members and the Trust.
- Building stronger alignment and unity of purpose between staff and Trust Management, for positive dialogue and feedback.

Third Membership Event

This was held on 8th December 2011 and was a successful event even though the adverse weather conditions had caused many people to be advised not to travel that evening. In some respects this could be said to have been a hidden benefit in that we therefore knew that those who did come, really were the committed members with whom we are now aiming to engage... (Demurring however, to those who do live too far away!)

The event was centred around 'Care of the Elderly'. Steve Parry, one of our leading Consultant Geriatricians, and Clare Abley, a Nurse Specialist for Dementia, both gave very interesting and thought-provoking presentations.

Discussions and questions at the end of the evening were very lively. It was particularly pleasing to have one of our members interested in giving further and on-going feedback, keeping in touch with the Directorate through Dr Parry.

The next Membership Event is now scheduled for April. Although the exact date is not yet finalised, the subject this time is to be 'Women's Services'.

Further Membership Engagement Evening

We are also delighted to mention a further event for members that is to be held in the near future. This is being chiefly organised by the Business Development Working Group, chaired by Mrs Mary Ann Hargreave. The Trust Annual Plan is to be the substance of this event. The Chief Executive and Directors of the Trust were pleased to receive the input given by governors to last year's Annual Plan. As those of us who are public governors represent our wider membership, the idea is to invite any members who are interested, to join us in this. It is hoped that members will be willing and able to come and offer direct feedback and input.

Directorate Involvement

The first visit the MCR group made late last year was very positive in both staff and public involvement and input. We are therefore planning to continue along this vein over the next year. Following this line means that recruitment is also geared directly towards our service users. Engagement is much more likely to follow too.

Student Involvement

In December 2011 the MCR working group went to the Civic Centre in Newcastle. The purpose was two-fold. Firstly, we put up several of our Trust posters and left a variety of leaflets including membership forms in the public area in the Rates Hall.

Secondly we had an extremely positive meeting with Professor Alastair Burt – the Dean of Medicine at Newcastle University. We explored ways in which we could work with the students in the Medical, Dental and Nursing Departments. Various initiatives were suggested and we are very much looking forward to working with them on these.

It is also hoped that we could make contact with the Business School with the possibility of those students undertaking a project around membership development and engagement. These avenues are to be explored further.

The possibility of creating a 'student governor' position was also discussed. It was agreed that this could be a very positive stand and that the necessary details could be looked into after the up-coming legislation is finalised and the Trust Constitution can be more easily amended.

This leads on to the next MCR meeting in February. As Newcastle is proud to boast two universities and not just one, it is important to include both in any of our plans for student contact. We are delighted that Professor Andrew Wathey, the Vice Chancellor of Northumbria University at Newcastle, has agreed to join us in February and we plan to more or less mirror the meeting we had with Professor Burt.

C. ACTIONS

As always, the actions required remain the same:

Commitment to the Trust by advocating membership at every opportunity and then encouraging engagement with us.

The usual suggestions are again offered below.

- 'Round Robin' email to use, and continue using, from time to time. (Please do let me know if you would like a further copy of our possible 'guide/template email')
- Do you have new contacts to whom it could be sent now?
- Do you carry a few membership forms in your bags?
- Do you talk to friends and relatives about joining the Trust?
- Do you ask members for feedback or any other involvement?

Can you think of anything else you can do to promote the Trust?

D. RECOMMENDATION

To agree to the proposal that, for 2012, membership recruitment should be focused on patients, staff and volunteers associated with our hospitals and for the focus to now be on quality engagement with committed members. Achieving this quality, member involvement and participation will necessarily effect membership target figures.

The number of members should still be maintained at a minimum of 9,000 in total, but without added pressure to grow the membership.

Sandy Harvey
Chair - MCR Governor Working Group
12th January 2012