

CASE STUDY: 10-year partnership with a continuously improving NHS Trust

Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust

Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust is an acute NHS Trust serving hospitals in Colchester and the surrounding area of north east Essex. The Trust employs more than 3,600 people.

Need

To respond to the growing issue of harassment and bullying as indicated by staff surveys.

Project

An integrated programme of training for staff; establishing contact officers as a first port of call; training investigators internally; and building managerial conflict management skills.

Outcomes

A range of effective solutions to workplace conflict, and bullying and harassment customised to the Trust's specific needs.

The Brief

In 2001 Colchester Hospital University NHS Trust (then Essex Rivers NHS Trust) was encountering significant change ('permanent white water' as Sue Edean, Senior HR Manager explained) and despite their best efforts a growing issue with harassment and bullying was indicated by staff surveys. In 2002/3 a new single Bullying & Harassment policy was created and as part of an overall Equal Opportunities strategy they identified the need for internal contact officers and investigators, and to build the staff's awareness of bullying and harassment in terms of policy, and expectations. There was felt to be a gap in provision for those who wanted advice and support, but were unable or unwilling to get it from HR, their Unions or other sources (like Occupational Health).

The brief was to:

- Rebuild trust in the Trust's willingness to tackle bullying.
- Help people get through difficult situations and get back to work by creating an early warning system and preventing escalation with the introduction of a new 'Contact Officer' role.
- To have internal investigators who could undertake internal investigations consistently, fairly and rigorously.
- To build the skills of staff in responding constructively to conflict and bullying and harassment.

The Project as it evolved over 10 years

CMP developed a recruitment plan which involved group workshops to advertise the new roles and raise awareness about

the new approach; creating person specifications for the roles and providing support at interviews to give subject expertise.

We trained the Contact Officers, and ran a similar process for the training of Investigators. 'Conflict Management Skills Workshops' were rolled out across the Trust to start to rebuild confidence and trust.

This initial work secured a high level of staff involvement and usage across the organisation and across all staff groups, so by 2004 a new tranche of contact officers and investigators were trained.

The Key Factors in the success of CMP's support in this early stage were:

- Commitment from the top (the Trust Board issued a clear message)
- Clearly established policy and procedure
- Awareness raising sessions (training, focus groups, posters, newsletter articles)
- Support infrastructure (Occupational Health, Contact Officers)
- High quality skills training

Raising Awareness to Bullying and Harassment Policy

In 2005 CMP designed and delivered ten half-day awareness sessions for all staff with the aim of increasing understanding of the new Bullying and Harassment policy. The benefits of these sessions were:

- All employees felt actively involved in the policy implementation.
- A higher degree of responsibility in bullying and harassment was taken by employees.
- Employees had a better understanding of the policy and how it related to them and their colleagues.
- The processes available to employees were made clear, with the benefits of these approaches outlined and understood.

Offering a wide range of solutions in response to the review: 2005 - 2008

Between 2005 and 2008 CMP supplied professional mediation services to Colchester University Hospitals NHS Trust (Colchester), trained a further tranche of Contact Officers and ensured through networking and regular feedback that the Investigators continued to function well.

Focusing On Conflict Management: 2009-10

Colchester commissioned CMP to design a short bespoke interactive workshop entitled 'Conflict Management and Influencing Skills' for inclusion on the Service Leadership Development Programme (SLDP). The mixture of practical tips and effective models of conflict management were well received with attendees suggesting they felt more confident in having difficult conversations after the training. They also felt able to translate the skills learned into effective action back in the workplace.

Handling aggressive callers on the telephone

A call centre team were receiving high numbers of aggressive phone calls and Colchester approached CMP to see if we could support them. We delivered two workshops which were extremely well received by the delegates.

Professional mediations

The professional mediation cases that were conducted allowed for Colchester to:

- Provide an independent, professional mediator to resolve disputes and reduce escalation to formal procedures.
- Create increased understanding between parties to come to a needs-based understanding.
- Provide conflict management tools for parties for ongoing resolution.
- Provide organisational feedback to ensure that lessons learned were effectively implemented.

The benefits of a long term relationship

CMP's relationship with Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust has been resilient and productive. As partner members of CMP's best practice group, FEDR (The Forum for Excellence in Dispute Resolution) the Trust has always been willing to share their experiences and build best practice through workshops, conferences and informal networking.