

Implementation of a virtual professional network for Allied Health Profession trainee and Advanced Practitioners to reduce feelings of professional isolation

Tanya Rumney, Training Programme Director (Allied Health Professions) North West Faculty for Advancing Practice

Introduction

Aim: The overall aim of the project was to reduce feelings of professional isolation experienced when working as an Advanced Practitioner (AP) or advanced level of practice for Allied Health Professions (AHPs).

Small numbers of AHPs working at this level in an organisation leading to feelings of professional isolation

Establish a virtual network to allow sharing of knowledge and experiences

AHP AP's feeling less professionally isolated due to networks established across the northwest

Background

This aim was developed following initial scoping suggesting that AP's from AHP backgrounds, are working in small numbers across the Northwest.

This was especially evident in the smaller professions such as Podiatrists, Dietitians and Speech & Language Therapists.

The project aimed to develop a virtual network that allowed 6 x 4-weekly one hour Microsoft Teams meetings and access to a dedicated community of practice space on the FutureNHS platform.

Methods

Initial data collection

An initial survey, via Microsoft Forms, was utilised to survey the workforce. The survey was promoted by email and Twitter aimed at trainee APs and APs from AHP backgrounds. It was open from 21/3/22 until 31/10/22 and received 81 responses.

Of the 81 respondents, 41 were qualified Advanced Practitioners and 22 were trainees. The survey supported the evidence that AHPs working at this level do experience feelings of professional isolation with only 17% (13 out of 76) of respondents stating that they did not feel professionally isolated.

Follow up data collection

A follow up survey was sent out after the virtual network meetings had been held to establish whether the project had achieved its aim.

The Virtual Network

Six meetings were set up and all survey respondents were emailed diary invites with MS Teams links for 6 meetings. The dates were established as Mondays between 6 – 7pm, these were monthly between May and October 2022. All meetings were chaired by the Training Programme Director (TPD) for AHP's, who was also the project lead.

In total, there were 47 attendees, 16 of whom attended more than one. Topics included supervision, supported e-portfolio, topics for the AHPs to deliver with relevance to AP, case studies and shared experiences. Updates from the Faculty for Advancing Practice were provided at each meeting.

A dedicated workspace on **FuturesNHS Platform** was established entitled 'Allied Health Professions in Advanced Practice roles across North West England'.

Results

The follow up survey was circulated to all 81 respondents to the initial survey as well as all who attended the virtual meetings. Not all attendees of the virtual meetings had completed the initial survey.

The follow up MS Forms survey opened on 24/10/22 for a 2-week period and received 19 responses.

Of the 19 responses, 7 (37%) had attended the virtual network meetings and 12 had not. 100% of those who did not attend, cited 'inconvenient time of day (at 6pm)' as being the reason for non-attendance.

Of the 7 responses received, the average rating was 3.71 out of 5 in achieving its purpose of connecting AHPs across the northwest.



Conclusion

Overall with the feedback received from the follow up survey, it can be concluded that for those who attend the network meetings, the project had achieved its overall aim and purpose.

The success in reaching a wider audience, however, was limited due to the time of day for most practitioners.

Project Performance Analysis and Lessons Learned

The difficulty in engaging AHPs to join the network and particularly to utilise the FutureNHS platform was not anticipated.

The follow up survey suggests that the timing of the meetings, being at 6pm, was inconvenient for many, therefore preventing attendance. This would be considered in future projects.