

Improving Skills, Engagement and Recruitment within the Workforce to drive results

Insights from St Vincent's Private Hospital



Over the past decade, St Vincent's Private Hospital has developed and maintained a strong workplace culture through a focus on transformational leadership, transparency and recognition.

With a current 2-3 per cent staff turnover rate, it seems that St Vincent's approach to putting culture at the heart of workforce planning is working. What's more, it is one of only three Australian hospitals with International Magnet Recognition – a framework which acknowledges high quality nursing and effectively influences the strategies to assist in staff engagement, recruitment and support for skill development.

*Ahead of the **11th Annual Workforce Planning for Healthcare Summit 2017**, Sarah Coleman, Workforce Planning and Development Manager at St Vincent's Private Hospital Sydney, shares the benefits Magnet provides in terms of meeting long-term workforce and business objectives; and the key strategies her team is using to sustain a strong workforce culture to drive engagement and improve retention.*

3 key ingredients needed to build a strong workforce culture:

1. Transformational leadership

“St Vincent's is a non-for-profit private hospital which was established by the Sisters of Charity over 100 years ago. Since then, we've had a long time to establish a strong culture which is based on the values of the Sisters Charity. These values are excellence, compassion, justice and integrity and have held us in good stead throughout the last 100-odd years.

But over the last 10 to 15 years we have been on the road to Magnet recognition, so we have been using strategies like transformational leadership which is about ensuring we have got clear and transparent leadership that is consultative with staff. This also involves having a clear structure on power, so our staff feel they have a say and they can have the power to change things and how they operate so they can lead from the bedside.”



2. Education

“Ensuring our staff have the opportunities for education is also a big part of developing a good workforce culture. We have a relationship with one of the universities so staff can study for free up to doctoral level. We have a huge number of staff who have post-grad qualifications and we currently have 12 staff members doing doctorate studies; and they’re supported by the hospital in doing so. This creates a real culture of new knowledge, innovation and research. Staff in all different areas of the hospital are working on different research projects or quality initiatives to continually improve the way we do things.

Magnet is a framework we use to ensure that we’re always growing and offering new opportunities for staff. It is a four year credentialing cycle and we have to report annually back to the Magnet office on how we are doing. One of the big rocks with professional development is we have to show that we have targets for increasing the number of qualified staff. For example, we have targets that all our management team will have tertiary qualifications and that a certain percentage of our registered nursing cohort will have tertiary qualifications. This is a big part of the Magnet framework that helps us to really strive to ensure we have very well qualified staff.”

3. Focusing on high quality of care

“Staff are really proud of the fact that we provide such a high quality of care to our patients and that their colleagues are also very conscious of ensuring that our patient care is of a really high standard. This means they are proud to come to work because they are confident in the care being provided.”



Ensuring solid staff retention

“Staff come to St Vincent’s Private because of the reputation and they stay because of the culture. Culture is a really important part of retaining good staff and we have several programmes in place to help facilitate this. One example is our Teammate programme which is where we have year 11 and 12 students come in and start studying nursing.

These students work on the wards and then go on to university to do their Bachelor of Nursing. They then come back as new graduates to work as registered nurses, and then stay on after the new graduate programme is done. The new graduate programmes also provide a lot of opportunities for research as well.

For example, we have set up a programme with the University of Tasmania where new graduates finish with a university qualification. We also have different structures such as the Magnet Professional Practice Programme where staff can jump up and accelerate their career progression.

We also have a three tiered CNF pathway for those who are above those levels, where we recognise staff and reward them for doing further study; as well as going that extra mile in the workplace in areas such as leadership and mentoring.

While one of our big strategies is retention and we invest a lot in our staff, we’re also happy to let them go. For example, we will let staff go travelling overseas for a year; transfer them to casual for that year, so that when they come back they can start working with us. This means we get them back with greater worldwide experience and they tend to come back because they can get straight back into work without having to apply for a new role.”

Challenges and solutions to effective workforce planning

Challenge 1: Balancing skills with engagement

Solution: Implementing a best practice rostering system

“We use a best practice rostering system within the hospital where all staff are identified as either beginner, intermediate or advanced practitioners. When we have a vacancy, we try and recruit into that level. If we can’t recruit, then we put strategies into place to ensure we can accelerate the training of more junior staff up to that level. We use this best practice rostering to ensure that the skill mix on every shift is adequate.

The junior staff are also supported by the senior staff on the ward on each shift. We have hundreds and hundreds of undergraduate students every year and often our new graduates have been here on practical development. As a result, we will tap the good students on the shoulder and encourage them to apply for our graduate programme, which has been really successful.

This process means we’ve had opportunities to see how they work and if their going to be a good fit for our organisation. It also means if they come on board, those graduates they have a better understanding of what we expect as well.”

Challenge 2: Changing workforce demographics

Solution: Flexible working practices

“For the part of our workforce that is shifting into retirement, we have got a couple of different strategies in place. Staff can work part time or casual.



We also have situations where staff have been in senior management roles and as they transition to retirement they work only a few hours each week in other areas; such as receptionists or doing volunteering. Because they only have to commit to four hours a day, it's a lot lower stress level than their old jobs, but they still come into the organisation each day to see their team and ensure they have a slower transition into retirement.”

Challenge 3: Maintaining a strong culture

Solution: Communication and transparency

“We are really aware of the fact that establishing a strong culture is one thing but maintaining it is even harder. This is mainly due to the expectations that staff begin to have. For example, staff expect extraordinary recognition or they might expect to have a stay in the way things are done, because that is the culture we have established over time.

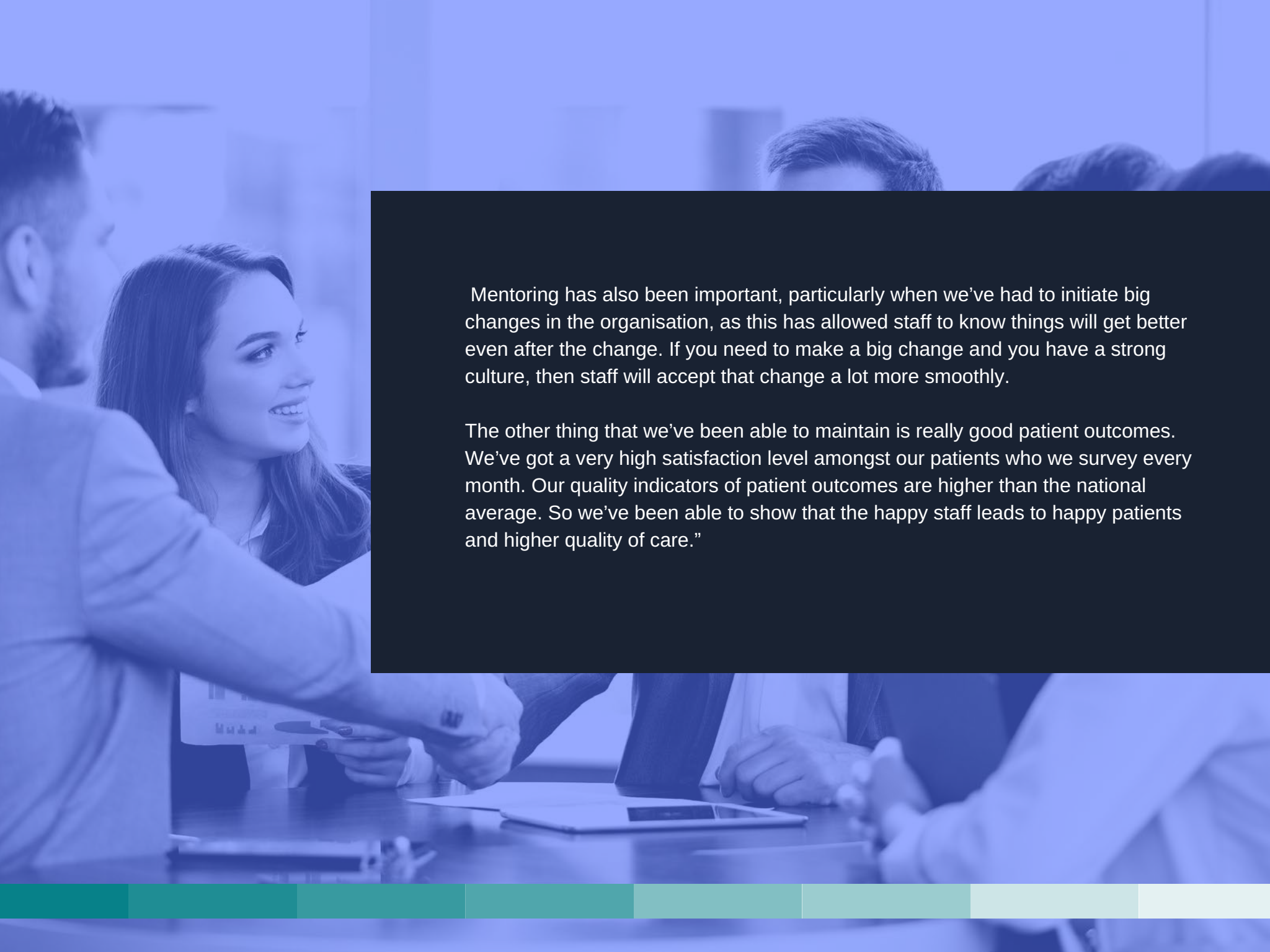
But sometimes when we have maybe 10 staff on a unit wanting to all do different quality programmes at the same time, we need to put a few of these on hold. While these staff members will still get the opportunity to complete these different programs, it is important to communicate and be transparent about all decisions being made.”

Results: improving retention and staff satisfaction in the clinical workforce

“We have had no Registered Nursing vacancies in about 12 years. We proactively recruit to ensure we stay on top recruitment at all times - we've even had lists of staff waiting to come on board for permanent positions.

We've also seen our average length of employment improve to be about ten years and we have a really low turnover which is less than three per cent. These achievements have been realised through ensuring that we have a strong workplace culture.





Mentoring has also been important, particularly when we've had to initiate big changes in the organisation, as this has allowed staff to know things will get better even after the change. If you need to make a big change and you have a strong culture, then staff will accept that change a lot more smoothly.

The other thing that we've been able to maintain is really good patient outcomes. We've got a very high satisfaction level amongst our patients who we survey every month. Our quality indicators of patient outcomes are higher than the national average. So we've been able to show that the happy staff leads to happy patients and higher quality of care."

Interested in learning more?

Join Sarah at the **11th Annual Workforce Planning for Healthcare Summit 2017**, where she will be running a workshop on how to:

- Understanding the characteristics of Magnet Recognition and how it can influence your organisation's quality professional development, support for nursing staff and workplace value to meet KPIs and improve patient outcomes
- How does Magnet Recognition make your health service stand out? Insights into driving compassionate care to prepare for future increased demand on services while maintaining employee job satisfaction
- Balancing the skills, engagement and recruitment of new graduates, volunteers and those transitioning into retirement to manage shift work for all workforces
- Improving your data collection and analysis to manage your supply and demand of full-time, part-time and volunteers

For more information visit <http://healthcareworkforce.iqpc.com.au> or call **+61 2 9229 1000** or email enquire@iqpc.com.au

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