

Working in the independent healthcare sector

Careers, control, culture



Introduction

The covid19 pandemic has demonstrated just how critical all healthcare workers, including those in the independent sector, are in keeping our nation safe. Indeed, with over 85,000 people employed or contracted by members of the Independent Healthcare Providers Network (IHPN), the independent health sector plays a vital role working alongside the NHS in treating patients and keeping the nation well for longer.

As is the case across the majority of the developed world, workforce shortages are a key challenge facing providers across the UK healthcare system, and the independent healthcare sector is keen to play its part in ensuring that the healthcare workforce is fit to meet the nation's changing demographics and care needs.

And with surveys frequently showing high staff satisfaction rates, IHPN has therefore begun a piece of work looking at what it's like to work in the independent healthcare sector and to help encourage more people to consider working for independent providers who are delivering high quality care for both NHS and private patients.

This report draws on extensive research, surveys, quantitative evidence, and findings from staff focus groups and individual interviews to identify what it's like working in the independent health sector around three key themes – career, control and culture.

These key themes came up time and again and highlighted how staff working in the independent sector report being able to access ambitious professional development opportunities; are able to work more flexibly and maintain a healthy work-life balance; and work in an inclusive and supportive workplace culture. And most importantly, across the sector staff felt they had the time to care for their patients and deliver the outcomes that matter most to them.



Contents

Introduction	2
---------------------	----------

The independent sector	3
About	

Enabling development and fulfilment	4
Careers	

Ensuring our staff have voice, control and influence	6
Control	

Creating a healthy, inclusive and compassionate culture	7
Culture	

How the pandemic has impacted on life working in the independent sector	9
Covid19	

About:

The independent healthcare sector

Since 1948, independent healthcare providers have played a key role in delivering NHS services, and each year deliver care to over 10 million NHS patients every year – in addition to the over 750,000 private patients journeys every year in independent hospitals.

And since the outbreak of covid19, independent providers have played a core role in the health system's response to the virus, most notably through the historic agreement between the NHS and independent hospitals whereby virtually all the sector's beds, staff and equipment were made available to the NHS, on an "at cost" basis. As a result, almost 2 million NHS operations, tests, chemotherapy sessions and consultations have been delivered in independent hospitals since March.

A similar partnership was also agreed with independent diagnostics providers, with 33 CT scanners being made available to the NHS from the independent sector, along with 300 radiographers and clinical assistants - helping play a key role in the accurate diagnosis of people with suspected covid19 infection. Independent primary and community providers have also worked tirelessly to ensure thousands of patients could continue to receive treatment during the pandemic.

IHPN represents a diverse network of organisations who offer a wide range of career opportunities and patient services from acute, primary, community, clinical home healthcare, diagnostic and dentistry services. Our organisations also vary in size, ranging from small not-for-profit single site providers to large international corporate hospital groups.

As such our members' workforce is equally diverse, with organisations ranging from those employing just 19 staff to those with over 10,000 employees.

Looking at latest data from the NHS' Workforce Minimum Data Set (wMDS) from 2019, as well as IHPN's own research, we can see the key demographics of our workforce, altogether creating a diverse and flexible workplace.

Key findings:

Our sector is **diverse** and offers a **wide range** of clinical services

The sector employs

85,000+

members of staff

With more than

80%

of independent acute providers rated good or outstanding by the CQC

Key demographics of our workforce



45 yrs

Average age of employee



19 to 10,000+

Range of employees in our member organisations



6+ yrs

Time the average member of staff stays at one of our organisations



35%

of employees work part-time



79%

of our employees are female

Careers:

Enabling development and fulfilment

Right across the sector, our research from staff focus groups found significant value and importance is placed on individual employees' careers and their personal development. There is seen to be significant funding for learning and development in the sector, particularly in comparison with the NHS, and organisations offer a variety of training opportunities to encourage employees to progress professionally. Examples include graduate, developing Advanced Professional Practice, Advanced Clinical Practice and Consultant programmes.

Equally, staff themselves are empowered to propose specific training sessions which will improve their skills and the care they provide, as well as to develop further within their role. Due to the agile nature of the organisations in the sector, these tailored requests are often processed efficiently, with staff members enrolled in courses or training schemes quickly. Bespoke training pathways are offered across the sector, ranging from entry level clinical and non-clinical roles (HCA apprenticeships, Trainee Nurse associate programme, Nursing Preceptorship programmes) up to Clinical leadership training and Level 7 Post graduate courses.

Key findings:

Professional development is prioritised by employers

Extensive training programmes are available and tailored to the individual

Hard work and stand-out contributions are recognised and appropriately rewarded

Organisations have more dynamic promotional opportunities

Case study:

Keisha Robinson

Radiotherapy Services Manager, Aspen Healthcare

I started working at Aspen's Cancer Centre London in August 2005 as a senior 2 radiographer before moving to my current role as Radiotherapy Services Manager, with responsibility for all aspects of the delivery of radiotherapy at CCL. I have benefitted immensely from Aspen's culture of support for professional development and career progression. Aspen's generous training and development policies enabled me to complete a Masters of Science in Radiotherapy and Oncology. I have also been given the opportunity to attend numerous national and international conferences, study days and specialists skills training course. These courses enhanced my knowledge and technical abilities specific to my expertise and my general managerial skills.



Careers: Enabling development and fulfilment



If you want to be recognised as an individual, be developed and work hard it is definitely noticed.



A key theme that came across in this project was that independent healthcare providers recognise members of staff as individuals - valuing their strengths and areas of interest. Indeed, individuals' strengths are capitalised on, and employees are able to tailor their roles to suit their specific skills and capabilities. Hard work is also recognised and rewarded in the sector and this is seen to not only improve the quality of care being given to patients, but also accelerate employees' own career progression.

The recognition of hard work within the independent sector is complemented by the promotion structures that most organisations have in place. Employees highlighted that promotions are dynamic as organisations look to expand and grow. This was noted by many as being a contrast with the more rigid structures within the NHS.

Case study:

Job crafting at Connect Health

Connect Health have introduced a system of "Job Crafting", which won an award at the CIPD People Management awards 2020. This allows individuals to control and shape their role and enables them to tailor it make it more meaningful to them. This could be as simple as pledging not to access emails for the first 30 minutes of their day, or it could be to have walking meetings or to host external events.

Employees are asked a series of questions including:

- What gives you most energy? And what drains you?
- How does this impact your health and wellbeing?
- What tasks do you enjoy doing the most? Why do you think this is?
- What aspects of your job do you love and loathe?
- How could your job be crafted to improve your wellbeing?

Staff at Connect Health expressed how valuable they found this and that the results were noticeable on their happiness and wellbeing.

Control:

Ensuring our staff have voice, control and influence

One of the key sentiments that came across in speaking to those working in the independent health sector was that it's a place where you can simply "get on with the job". Indeed, staff felt they had real ownership over their work, with the ability to make a difference and influence what goes on in their own organisations.

This sense of control also can be seen with regards the ability of staff to have a positive work-life balance, with flexibility in how they work being seen as a huge benefit of working in the sector. Predictable working hours resulting from the largely planned care that the sector delivers mean that staff can plan around their shifts and maximise their time outside of work. It was noted that this is particularly beneficial to those with young children and likely a key factor in the 35 per cent of the sector's employees who work part time - indicating how work really can be tailored to family's needs.

Furthermore, the largely planned nature of service delivery in the sector also reduces the need for overtime and allows staff to have a healthier work-life balance. Shifts in the independent sector are also seen as flexible, and staff can shape their shift patterns to suit them. The absence of A&E and trauma units reduces the burden placed on staff, particularly nurses, and eradicates the impact that working unpredictable night shifts has on both wellbeing and body clock patterns.

In return for flexible working capabilities, staff members may be asked to be agile and to take on extra shifts or be able to swap with colleagues. Overtime is always paid for or reimbursed through additional leave. This influenced many of our staff to join the independent sector, in light of 58.7 per cent of NHS staff working unpaid hours on a weekly basis.

Key findings:

A positive work-life balance is encouraged, alongside flexibility in shifts

Spending quality one-to-one time with patients is a priority

Overtime is always reimbursed or can be reclaimed through extra-leave



Staff can 'focus on giving patients the best care, that is absolutely never compromised, whilst at the same time you are getting a good work life balance'.



Case study:

Katy Johns

Ward and Pre-operative assessment lead, Ramsay Health Care

After heart wrenching deliberation I decided to leave my NHS career in April 2019. Having looked around Ramsay's Clifton Park Hospital I was impressed with how positive, forward thinking, supportive and hands on the Matron was, and this inspired me to apply for the position of Ward and POA lead, which I was offered and I started my job in January 2020. We deliver high standards of care because we are happy, supported and up to date - I enjoy every day at work and having time to care has improved my morale and job satisfaction.



Culture:

Creating a healthy, inclusive and compassionate culture

Across the board, staff working in the independent health sector have told us that their organisation has a 'family feel'. This culture typically 'comes from the top' and filters down into teams and individual working relationships. Most independent organisations are small and as such there is a strong emphasis on working as a team. During periods of stress or high demand, staff reported that there is never a culture of blame; rather everybody pulls together to find a solution and ensure that patients continue to receive high quality care. Likewise, effective management and accountability structures means that incidents of bullying, intolerance or unpleasantness are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The visibility of senior management intensifies the emphasis on transparency, collaboration and collective ambition. Individuals we spoke to reported that senior management were often involved in staff meetings or seen on the wards. Similarly, staff commented that the accessibility to the senior management team means that staff can help shape the business and flag areas that need further support or development. For example, we heard of staff expressing a need for extra equipment or an additional staff member and their requests were listened to and acted upon.

Key findings:

Member organisations have an intimate 'family feel'

Bullying and harassment has no place in the independent sector and there are formalised procedures in place to ensure that it is minimised

Senior management teams are visible

Staff wellbeing is genuinely valued by employer organisations

Case study:

Emily Byatt

Service Manager, Lincolnshire Community Pain Management Service, Connect Health

I joined Connect Health in May 2019 and immediately discovered it is such a well-led organisation. I am in awe of the organisation's structure, IT capability, and the network of leadership. For example, at the Leadership Conference, we saw the senior management team sharing the strategy and working together - the room was buzzing; full of positive energy, ideas and progress. It is the best HR team I've ever worked with and there's so much support on hand. There's a real can-do attitude - the culture is all about investment in people and focusing on investing in people. There is a genuine desire to improve people's health and wellbeing – and that applies to staff and patients.



Culture: Creating a healthy, inclusive and compassionate culture



“

At the Leadership Conference, we saw the senior management team sharing the strategy and working together - the room was buzzing; full of positive energy, ideas and progress

”

Wellbeing and reward initiatives also exist extensively across the sector to support employees. Recognition of good work varies in nature from company to company, including ‘big-ups’ and ‘shout-outs’, with allocated time where team members are given the opportunity to showcase examples of best practice and good work from within the team. This highlights their colleagues’ contributions and recognises their hard work from the week. Staff said that this leaves them ‘feeling valued, appreciated and thanked for the job you do’.

Additional initiatives and processes also exist to improve and maintain staff wellbeing. These differ between organisations, but multiple member organisations encourage staff to participate in team activities, lunch time walks and yoga before or after work. This was recognised as a significant benefit of the independent sector and staff noted that their wellbeing is genuinely valued by their employer organisation.

Case study:

One Medical Group (OMG)

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

One Medical Group (OMG) launched a Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which spans from 2019-2022, as part of their commitment to employees to ensure that they improve and enable teams to look after their wellbeing. The strategy includes various events throughout the year which are in line with national health campaigns. As part of this strategy OMG introduced a wellbeing retreat at their OneWellness centre. The retreat is a two-day event where staff members

focus on learning about wellbeing, physical health, healthy eating, developing resilience and being the best version of themselves. Activities, such as yoga, aid the development and learning. As a follow-up employees can participate in one to one health checks which further promote wellbeing and provide employees with the information and support that they need to achieve their health goals.

Covid19:

How the pandemic has impacted on life working in the independent sector

The covid19 pandemic has had a huge impact on those working across all healthcare settings, with staff facing some of the most challenging conditions in their working lives.

Indeed, the day to day work of in much of the independent sector have drastically changed. For those providers delivering primary and community services, they have had to swiftly adapt to lockdown and a move to social distancing, including switching from face-to-face to virtual consultations, as well as repurposing their services to help support the NHS deal with covid.

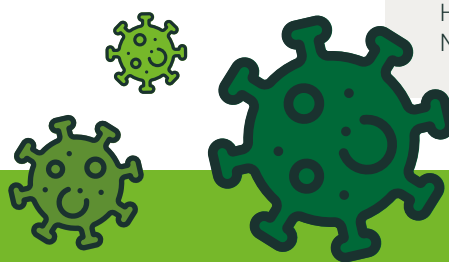
And for those working in independent hospitals, as part of a historic deal agreed in March, the entire capacity of the independent hospitals sector, including its 20,000 strong frontline workforce, was made available to the NHS to ensure the health service could cope with any surges in the virus and that urgent NHS treatment could continue.

As a result, medical teams from both the NHS and independent worked side by side to enable the delivery of vital NHS treatment throughout the pandemic. Particularly in those independent hospitals which traditionally deliver elective orthopaedic care, staff have really stepped up and adapted to their new working environment, undertaking a rapid programme of training to ensure they had the necessary skills to carry out more complex procedures for NHS patients. For example, some independent hospitals went from delivering just one core specialty to as many as nine in the space of just weeks.



In this current pandemic and a time of great challenge, anxiety and stress to patients and staff, it's with great pride we have watched teams of staff come together and united continue to deliver the best care and service to our patients. We have watched them smile, laugh and work incredibly hard to set this service up quickly and efficiently.

Head of Nursing,
NHS Trust



Case study:

Spire Healthcare

Colleague communication and engagement app

Recognising that a more inclusive and open approach would be needed during the pandemic, Spire Healthcare launched a colleague communication and engagement app to enable it to communicate directly with staff. The app enables the sharing of both national and local news, with hospitals able to post to their own local news feed too, as well as allowing

the organisation to share important business updates from their CEO, press coverage, "Spire Superstar Shout Outs". The app has proved to be "game changer" from a cultural perspective, with positive feedback from colleagues shielding, WFH and working in their local Trusts that it has helped them keep in touch with what's going on.

Covid19: How the pandemic has impacted on life working in the independent sector

Equally, significant numbers of NHS staff were welcomed into independent sector facilities to help deliver care to NHS patients. Indeed, in some cases whole NHS departments (notably those delivering oncology services), were transferred to independent hospitals with existing staff putting in place all the necessary arrangement to ensure a smooth and speedy transfer such as essential medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, IT network capabilities and clinical governance collaborations.

The success of these NHS/independent sector partnerships, integrating teams at an unprecedented speed, is viewed as being a direct result of the aforementioned agile and flexible workforce culture that can be found in the independent sector. For example, the lower levels of bureaucracy that can be found in the sector was seen as key to being able to “get things done” and be agile and flexible in a crisis, whilst still ensuring the highest levels of patient safety. Equally, the culture of respect, inclusion and collaboration in the independent sector is seen as having directly enabled organisations to be more nimble during the crisis, and in a number of areas the sector’s values have been further cemented during covid.

Indeed, providers across the independent health sector have really acknowledged the immense challenges covid has placed on its staff and have gone out of their way to support their workforce and prioritise their health and wellbeing.

Case study:

Circle Health Group

Expert-led guidance and tools

Circle Health Group have widely promoted wellbeing apps to staff, giving access to expert-led wellbeing guidance and tools that cover the three fundamental pillars of wellbeing: physical, mental and financial. Employees have access to hundreds of free on-demand fitness videos, healthy recipes and nutrition tips, impartial money guidance and useful videos, articles, and guidance to support strong mental and physical health.



We are impressed by how quickly, safely and efficiently the team has mobilised to meet the challenge, switching from planned elective surgery to trauma and upskilling to take on specialties the hospital has never carried out before.

Chief Operating Office, NHS Trust



Flexible working has of course taken on a whole new meaning during the pandemic, with providers in the sector offering temporary redeployment opportunities, agreeing changes to working patterns to accommodate childcare challenges, as well as sabbaticals and unpaid leave requests being supported.

Additional support for employees has also come in the form of both financial support such as all shielding colleagues receiving full pay, with financial assistance and advice provided via Employment Assistance Programmes, as well as health and mental wellbeing support measures. For example, Additional occupational health support has also been made available across the sector, with extensive wellbeing webinars used to cover a range of topics around mental health and colleague reliance, and frequent wellbeing surveys to monitor all colleagues both home and facility-based to ensure staff are supported as much as possible.

For those on the frontline, welfare check in calls with trained EAP counsellors to staff who had been affected by Covid were also made available to ensure they are supported and signposted to appropriate services, with bereavement support packs available to employees should they experience the death of a loved one.

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light like never before on the invaluable role that staff across the healthcare system play in keeping the country safe. And whilst it's still uncertain what the future may hold in terms of the pandemic, one thing is clear, there is a vital need to attract, recruit and retain the healthcare workforce.

Of course while there will be no one silver bullet to solving current healthcare workforce issues, we believe that emphasising the diversity of the health and care system, including the key role the independent healthcare sector plays, will be a key part in helping the health and care system attract the staff it needs for the long-term.

While sometimes the NHS and independent sector are seen as having competing interests, it is increasingly clear that independent providers play a key role in developing their own staff, which in turn supports the delivery of high quality patient care. And as part of the historic partnerships that have taken place during the covid19 pandemic, the sector has also played a role in supporting the development of NHS staff, with an [announcement](#) in autumn this year that NHS junior doctors will now be able to benefit from new training opportunities in the independent sector. This joint working with the NHS is something independent providers are keen to build on, and with the NHS still under intense pressure and the need to treat the growing numbers of patients waiting for care, these public/private partnerships will need to continue.

We hope this report helps showcase the experiences of those working in independent healthcare providers and encourages healthcare workers at all stages of their career to consider the independent sector as a place where they can develop their career, have control over their work, and enjoy an inclusive compassionate working culture.



The Independent Healthcare Providers Network (IHPN) is the representative body for independent sector healthcare providers. Our members deliver a very diverse range of services to NHS and private patients including acute care, primary care, community care, clinical home healthcare, diagnostics and dentistry.

To learn more about this document and about IHPN, please contact us.

T. 07540 413 802

E. info@ihpn.org.uk

W. ihpn.org.uk