“Make a change – even small things can have a huge effect”

I f each member of staff on a ward did something different, the whole ward would change. The focus for me is not about cost improvements or targets, it is about making a difference for patients and staff. The ethos of NHS Change Day is that you don’t have to seek permission – it’s about recognising that you can just do something. Small actions can grow to be big things.

When I was a newly qualified nurse I wanted to change the world. You have ideas about what you want to do, but then you get bogged down in the politics and the targets. NHS Change Day has captured the imagination of the nurses with whom I work. It offers staff the chance to be themselves, the chance to do something they’re really passionate about. The clear message was “do it, and we’ll support you”. There is a real freedom to be found in change. Staff hadn’t felt that for a long time.

NHS Change Day has enabled senior people to connect with frontline teams over a positive message. Often when senior people engage it’s because there’s an issue, but NHS Change Day gave, for example, the chief executive of a trust the opportunity to work alongside a porter.

There are cynics who say “so what?” Dealing with that kind of attitude can be a challenge, but think about the simplest pledge, such as a smile. When you smile, you change the culture of where you’re working. That can have a profound effect.

If the culture in your workplace is one where you feel safe and comfortable, you’re much more likely to speak up if there’s a safety issue that needs raising. So, ultimately, that decision to smile could end up saving someone’s life.

A healthcare assistant decided she wanted to make change by reducing the “did not attend” rates for bladder test studies. She was fed up of patients simply not coming. She looked at relevant documentation to see how other departments had reduced DNA rates. Then she talked to patients. She discovered that, although appointments were booked well in advance, when the time for it came, patients were scared, didn’t have enough information and so didn’t turn up. Her change was to telephone patients five days before the appointment to remind them about it and ask if they wanted to rebook. This also gave them a chance to ask about the procedure and reduce anxiety.

The HCA next looked at ultrasound, which also had high DNAs; the numbers were too great to telephone individually so she put big bright stickers onto every letter, saying: “If you can’t make it, phone us up”. This led to a significant reduction in DNAs.

This HCA wanted to make a difference. As a team, we supported her, but she did the work. That’s what NHS Change Day is all about – getting rid of the hierarchy, so that frontline staff can make a difference. NT

NHS Change Day 2015 is on 11 March

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SPOTLIGHT
Frontline staff perfectly placed to set changes

This issue is published on NHS Change Day, an initiative to capture the wealth of creativity bubbling away in the minds of frontline staff, who come up with countless simple, effective ways to improve patient care. It also aims to ensure as many of these ideas as possible are not only acted upon but shared more widely across the NHS.

Our Innovation (page 12) reports on ‘Just Do It’, a local project set up by one trust to ensure staff have a forum through which to communicate ideas. It means someone is always ready to listen to staff and help them put ideas into practice. The trust is investing in the scheme and staff can apply for up to £2,500 to fund their ideas.

Frontline staff are perfectly placed to see where improvements can be made. It’s great to see initiatives like NHS Change Day and ‘Just Do It’ helping to make their voices heard.

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