

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> King's College London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17 Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving Care Quality and the Development of the Healthcare Support Worker Role in NHS England		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Ian Kessler	Professor of Public Policy and Management	From 01/09/2012
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013 – 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Between 1997 and 2007, 1,200 patients died unnecessarily at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust, in part because poorly trained healthcare support workers (HSW) were providing frontline care. Professor Ian Kessler and colleagues at King's Business School have addressed this shortcoming, generating the first evidence base on the training and development of HSWs. This evidence has prompted major government and organisational initiatives to improve the capabilities of HSWs, including the first national training and development strategy for this group of over 150,000 workers who dispense the majority of bedside care in NHS England. By contributing to the development of NHS-led practitioner initiatives for HSWs, King's researchers have helped to directly upskill a critical group of workers and, by empowering healthcare policymakers to make these changes, they have advanced the delivery of safer and more effective person-centred frontline care.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The structure and management of the healthcare workforce has been subject to intense debate among policymakers and practitioners around the world as they strive toward improved service efficiency and effectiveness in the context of growing user demand and resource constraints. In a labour-intensive sector where, despite technological advances, the delivery of frontline care principally involves face-to-face interaction between the employee and the patient, organisational responses to the pressures on service provision have increasingly centred on the workforce.</p> <p>The healthcare support workforce has been an established part of the NHS labour force since the inception of the NHS 70 years ago. However, HSWs (who work alongside and provide assistance to registered nurses) have remained unregulated and unregistered, with limited research evidence available on the skills and capabilities post-holders bring to—or develop within—the role.</p> <p>This invisibility and the associated weak evidence base have assumed increasing significance to care providers as nurses withdraw from the bedside to take on more administrative responsibility and HSWs become the main providers of frontline care. The paucity of evidence has, moreover, generated concern about HSWs amongst government policymakers and local healthcare managers, who view HSWs as a 'cheap' but also high-risk source of care.</p> <p>Driven by significant failures in the care delivered by poorly trained but increasingly deployed HSWs in the NHS, Professor Ian Kessler and colleagues at King's Business School have investigated how HSWs support care delivery. Building on work carried out at Oxford University into the nature and management of the HSW role, this research explored the interrelated areas of training and development needs of HSWs, career pathways and potential growth of new roles.</p> <p>The research examined the training and development needs of HSWs, exploring whether and how such needs have been met and with what consequences, including those for care quality. Adopting a multi-methods approach across four case studies of hospital trusts, King's researchers addressed questions related to employee career pathways into the HSW role; the management</p>		

of HSW training and opportunities for progression in the role; and the interactions between HSWs, patients and co-workers.

### Investigating career pathways

Research was undertaken at four hospital trusts across the UK between 2007–2009. Data were collected from HSWs, nurses and patients using a variety of research techniques. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 82 HSWs and 90 nurses along with focus groups involving a total of 94 recently discharged patients. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. In addition, 275 hours of on-ward non-participant observation were completed, involving the shadowing of 28 HSWs and 11 nurses across 11 wards. On each ward, up to three HSWs and one nurse were observed during their early shift. Finally, three surveys were carried out in the medical and surgical divisions of the case-study hospitals for each of the stakeholders: HSWs (n=746 total respondents; 51% response rate (RR)); nurses (n=689; 41% RR); and recently discharged patients (n=1,651; 51% RR).

This research revealed that individuals come to the HSW role with few formal qualifications, but with demonstrable skills in and experience of care work [1]. While nurses were sometimes unsure of the purpose and role of HSWs [2], patients were often better able to engage with HSWs than with nurses, viewing them as a more accessible source of emotional support [1]. The research also found that many HSWs took up the role with a desire to pursue a nursing career, although this was a largely unfulfilled aspiration [3]. Despite clearly articulated development needs revealed by the research, HSW training and career management emerged as often disordered and poorly delivered by healthcare managers, producing 'dead-end' jobs and de-motivated HSWs [3].

### Exploring training and development of innovative HSW roles

Funded by the National Institute of Health Research, a second stream of research produced rich case studies that captured the construction of advanced HSW roles such as colorectal support worker and surgical assistant practitioner [4]. This research uncovered the micro-processes required for such roles to become embedded into the workplace: how the roles initially emerged with the support of workplace 'champions'; how they became integrated into existing work routines; and how they established their legitimacy with co-workers and patients.

Additional case studies compared various organisational approaches to the training and development of advanced HSW roles and found that a bottom-up organic approach, sensitive to service design, proved more effective than a top-down approach driven by financial pressures [5].

This research also involved a survey on the incidence of advanced HSW roles across NHS England [6]. The survey highlighted the continued use of the role in general wards and its extension to specialist clinical areas including maternity and renal services. However, the research uncovered an absence of networking by employers and a desire for more sharing of best practice management of new HSW roles.

### 3. References to the research

The underpinning research was funded by the NHS National Institute for Health Research SDO Programme: Developing a high-performance assistant workforce (GBP255,221.00).

- [1] Kessler, I., Heron, P., & Dopson, S. (2015) Managing Patient Emotions and Being One of Us. *Work, Employment and Society*, 29(5), 775–791. DOI: 10.1177/0950017014559768
- [2] Kessler, I. Heron, P. and Dopson, S. (2015) Professionalization and Expertise in Care Work, The Hoarding and Discarding of Nursing Tasks. *Human Resource Management*, 54(5), 737–752. DOI: 10.1002/hrm.21695
- [3] Kessler, I., Bach, S., & Nath, V. (2019) The Construction of Career Aspirations Among Healthcare Support Workers: Beyond the Rational and the Mundane? *Industrial Relations Journal*, 50(2), 150–167. DOI: 10.1111/irj.12245
- [4] Kessler, I., Heron, P., & Spilsbury, K. (2017) Human Resource Management Innovation in Healthcare: The Institutionalisation of New Support Roles. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(2), 228–245. DOI: 10.1111/1748-8583.12114

- [5] Kessler, I., & Spilsbury, S. (2019) The Development of the New Assistant Practitioner Role in the English National Health Service: A Critical Realist Perspective. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 41(8), 1667–1684. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9566.12983
- [6] Kessler, I., & Nath, V. (2018) Re-Evaluating the Assistant Practitioner Role in NHS England: Survey Findings. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 27(3), 625–632. DOI:10.1111/jonm.12721

#### 4. Details of the impact

In the wake of catastrophic failures in healthcare and needless patient suffering, official inquiries placed considerable blame on the low standard of care delivered by poorly trained and managed HSWs. This was particularly the case with the Department of Health 2012 report on the abuse of patients with learning disabilities at the Winterbourne View hospital and the 2013 Francis Report on the unnecessary deaths at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust. Both reports suggested that the dilution of skill mix through the increased use of unregistered HSWs, in the context of financial pressures and ongoing difficulties recruiting registered nurses, contributed to the care failures.

Having explored these shortcomings and generating the first meaningful evidence base on the training and development of HSWs, King's researchers were well placed to contribute to an upskilling of HSWs. Influencing the establishment of career pathways for individual HSWs and prompting national and strategic organisational initiatives to improve the knowledge and capabilities of HSWs, this work enabled HSWs to develop and better use their skills to increase productivity and to deliver safer and more effective care.

##### **Influencing the Creation of a National Strategy for HSW Training and Development**

Published by Health Education England (HEE) in 2014, Talent for Care (TfC) [A] was the first ever national strategy for the training of HSWs in NHS England. King's researchers were consulted by and made a formal presentation of their research findings to the HEE working group tasked with formulating this strategy [B]. Kirk Lower, National Lead for Talent for Care *“was involved in the initial development of Talent for Care and as part of this remit met with Prof. Kessler to discuss his research findings, particularly on the training and development of health care assistants. Prof. Kessler also presented his research findings to the national stakeholder working group, chaired by Stephen Welfare, tasked with drafting Talent for Care”* [B].

Generating opportunities for HSWs to *Get In, Get On and Go Further* in the workplace, TfC sought to resolve the weaknesses in the training and development for this group of workers as revealed by King's researchers, particularly given their increased replacement of nurses in bedside care [2,3]. In particular, the TfC strategy supported the construction of career pathways highlighted by King's as previously under-developed [3]. Such pathways were designed to encourage HSWs to progress through different support roles and into registered nursing, helping to meet HSW career aspirations and, in the process, address shortages of registered nurses [A].

Given the disordered approach to HSW skills development highlighted by King's [3], TfC also fostered a more formal approach to the assessment of HSW training needs through more ordered and regular individual performance reviews. Such reviews were integral to workforce planning and the general performance management of NHS trusts, as regularly assessed and rated by the Care Quality Commission. Moreover, given King's evidence highlighting the 'success' of advanced support workers [4,5], TfC urged and nurtured the development of innovative support roles seen as contributing to organisational strategies designed to further the broader NHS policy goal of developing more person-centred healthcare [A].

##### **Evaluating the Positive Impacts of Talent for Care**

Indicative of their expert contribution to the development of TfC, King's researchers were invited by HEE to undertake an initial evaluation of the strategy in mid-2016 [C]. As attested by Jane Hadfield, National Senior Programme Manager – Apprenticeships at HEE, the King's report *“provided valuable insight into how Talent for Care was viewed and being used by Trusts in NHS England. It highlighted, in particular, the positive impact the strategy was having on organisational policy and practice, designed to improve support worker opportunities for training and development”* [D]. Comprising some 20 case studies of NHS Trusts, the evaluation found that TfC had gained considerable traction. Often for the first time, HSW training and development were being considered at board level, prompting changes in practice designed to increase recruitment

to the HSW role, provide more structured training opportunities and allow career progression into more advanced roles. TfC's positive impact was confirmed in a survey of healthcare providers in NHS England, undertaken by King's as part of this evaluation. The survey found that close to one in two (48%) NHS Trusts in England had discussed TfC at board level; over half (52%) had developed a written plan for the implementation of TfC; and most (83%) agreed or strongly agreed that "TfC had provided a 'useful' framework for the training and development of HCSWs" [C]. In terms of new practice as suggested by TfC, the survey revealed that almost all Trusts (94%) had introduced a more robust induction programme for HSWs; over two-thirds (69%) had developed formal competency frameworks for HSWs; and close to three-quarters (70%) had established secondment schemes for HSWs to train as registered nurses [C].

This prompted King's researchers to convene four regional workshops attended by over 100 local practitioners, allowing attendees to explore and communicate 'good' practice on the training and development of HSWs.

### **Refreshing Talent for Care: Creating New Career Pathways for HSW**

In the context of policy shifts, the government's encouragement of apprenticeship training in the NHS and the development of a new, registered advanced support role, HEE sought a follow-up review of TfC designed to ensure its ongoing value to healthcare employers. HEE again turned to King's researchers to assist in this review. Drawing on new case-study and survey research, the re-evaluation by King's researchers [E] found that TfC had lost some momentum among healthcare employers as they placed increased emphasis on work experience as a route into the HSW role, sought to use apprenticeships as the basis for HSW training and endeavoured to address shortages of registered nurses. Vanessa Convey, National Senior Programme Manager - Talent for Care at HEE, explained that "[t]he study findings directly informed the HEE process instigated to refresh the Talent for Care strategy" [F] and explicitly prompted HEE to work towards a refresh of TfC [G], ensuring it was better aligned with HSW training requirements and the evolving needs of healthcare employers. The refreshed TfC documentation is forthcoming.

The reevaluation also presented an opportunity for King's researchers to highlight the need for an enhanced apprenticeship career pathway for HSWs that allowed them to progress into registered nursing. This pathway was launched in 2017 and is increasingly used by hospital Trusts, with Department of Education data for 2019 indicating around 1,150 individuals on the HSW apprenticeship, 1,600 on the Senior HSW apprenticeship and 1,200 on the nurse degree apprenticeship [H].

The impact of King's research through TfC on organisational policy and practice has also been apparent in the development of advanced Assistant Practitioner (AP) support roles. Indicating the ongoing and layered impact on workforce development, King's researchers were asked to investigate AP roles and commissioned by the NHS Assistant Practitioner Network to carry out a survey of the role [6]. The research has been used to dispel myths and give clear insight into what the role is and who might take it up. For example, the Royal College of Nursing makes direct reference to the King's survey research in the information presented to encourage its HSW members to take up this role [I], with workforce data from NHS Digital indicate that the number of Assistant Practitioners in post has increased in recent years. Overall, therefore, this research at King's has contributed to major government and organisational initiatives, improving the skills and prospects of HSWs and advancing the quality of healthcare in England.

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[A] Health Education England (2014). *Talent for care: A national strategic framework to develop the healthcare support workforce*.

[B] Testimonial from National Lead for Talent for Care at Health Education England, NHS, 30 August 2020.

[C] Kessler, I. (2016). *An evaluation of Health Education England's talent for care strategy*. London: King's Business School.

[D] Testimonial from National Senior Programme Manager - Apprenticeships, at Health Education England, NHS, 03 August 2020.

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- [E] Kessler, I. (2017). A re-evaluation of Health Education's talent for care strategy.
- [F] Testimonial from National Senior Programme Manager - Talent for Care, at Health Education England, NHS, 30 August 2020.
- [G] Minutes of Talent for Care Implementation Group, 26 March 2018.
- [H] Data collected for the development of Kessler, I. Bach, S, and Griffin, R. (2020) Apprenticeships and the Pay Review Bodies London: Kings.
- [I] Royal College of Nursing, *Become an Assistant Practitioner: Dispelling the myths – promoting the role of the assistant practitioner*. Online. Retrieved on 15 Dec 2020.