

Developing leaders within the Allied Health Professions

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There are approximately 170,000 allied health professionals (AHPs) working within the NHS, accumulating over four million patient contacts per week¹. The prime position of AHPs within healthcare, working across organisational boundaries, makes them integral to most clinical pathways. There has been a realisation that there is an abundance of underutilised talent within this group. Which needs to be utilised if the NHS is to meet its long term plan². The Chief Allied Health Professions Officer in England and the wider team have had a significant impact in raising the profile of AHPs over recent years. Giving them a sense of collective identity and position within the workforce. Inspiring AHPs to re-think how they deliver their services, whilst shining a light on the importance and scale of the work they do. With the launch of the first strategy in 2017, which identified the transformative potential of AHPs³. A plethora of AHP centric guidance and strategies followed, focusing on public health^{1,4}, research^{5,6}, and leadership⁷⁻⁹ culminating with the recently published AHP strategy for 2022-2027, which states it is crucial that AHPs build the diversity of their leadership and step into these roles¹⁰.

Leadership

Great leaders are pivotal to delivering high-quality care^{2,11}. Hospital performance and the quality of care service users receive are all influenced by the quality of its leadership¹². Recently we have seen the emergence of advanced clinical roles for AHPs, including, advanced clinical practitioners, first contact practitioners and consultant posts. From a strategic viewpoint, we have seen the introduction of the Chief AHP role which has further engaged the AHP workforce, highlighting its value and contribution⁷. However, successful outcomes will not be solely reliant on these senior roles, it will depend on effective leadership across all levels and across the entire AHP workforce⁷. Leadership is not the dominion of the most senior staff, there is an increasing recognition that all employees need to show some level of leadership¹³.

This is where AHPs can learn from the nursing profession, which has benefited from a more vigorous approach to striving toward leadership progression. Historically nurses have been encouraged and incentivised to develop their leadership skills, and move into non-traditional leadership positions, unlike AHPs¹⁴. Consequently, the nursing profession continued to expand its leadership, resulting in recruitment to NHS board level positions. It is now a requirement for Foundation Trusts to have a director of nursing role¹⁴. This is a fantastic achievement by our nursing colleagues considering it wasn't too long ago that nursing leadership in the UK was described as a 'crisis'¹⁵.

Similar to what nurses experienced when they began transitioning into senior leadership roles, it has been suggested that AHPs may experience reluctance to let go of their prior identity and credibility as clinical practitioners, which may be a barrier to their leadership progression¹⁴. This is where leadership training is essential, to develop our AHP workforce and equip them with the confidence and skills required. Owing to the fact that we need more of our AHPs to step forward as leaders, helping us create professionally diverse leadership teams, which are best equipped to meet the challenges and ambitions of the NHS⁷.

The British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists is in the process of developing a leadership programme tailored to the needs of our profession.

The BAPO Leadership Programme

BAPO have been successful in obtaining an educational grant from Health Educational England (HEE). The intention of this funding is to implement a professional development programme to support the next generation of leaders in P&O.

To be truly effective, leaders need to build a toolkit of knowledge, skills and behaviours that will set them, their teams, and their organisations up for success. It is BAPO's aim to develop a programme which fulfils the delegates' leadership expectations from both an operational and strategic perspective.

Good leadership starts with self-awareness, so effective leaders must develop an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, their preferred style and approach, and their emotional triggers; and learn how to manage, mitigate, and maximise these for the benefit of their teams.

To support this self-awareness the cohort on the BAPO Leadership programme will be invited to undertake profiling and personal assessment. This will take the form of a SpotlightPROFILE®.

SpotlightPROFILE® is a personality profiling tool, designed with performance in mind. It has been applied within organisations and teams from a wide range of fields, from elite sport to the financial sector and now in the healthcare arena.

The core principles of SpotlightPROFILE® are:

- People change when there's something to be won or lost (and there's increasingly something to be won or lost in our daily interactions).
- Modern personality theory shows that we change across contexts, and with volitional effort - it's important to recognise and understand this shift.
- To connect and thrive in the modern workplace, it's important to be able to FLEX our behavioural style and COPE in a variety of ways, depending upon the mindset that we need.
- It's, therefore, less about "where you are" (on the profile) and much more about "where you can get to".
- Our weaknesses are often our strengths overplayed - anything to excess becomes toxic.

Essential leadership knowledge include finance, strategy, planning and team dynamics, but it doesn't end there. The best leaders expand their thinking beyond what's visible and obvious and can also capitalise on the hidden drivers of organisational success: inclusion, agility, flexibility, and employee wellbeing and engagement.

In addition, the BAPO Leadership Programme will comprise a mix of theoretical and practical skills elements all contributing to development of the cohorts' leadership toolkit.

Leaders are role models, and the example they set has a huge impact on the organisational culture. So, it's critical that they first appreciate and then demonstrate the appropriate behaviours that build trust and promote a positive working environment – and do so authentically and consistently.

Underpinning all of this is excellence in communication: influencing, persuading, negotiating, collaborating, networking; and engaging and inspiring people to bring their best selves to work every day.

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