Trust statement: NHS pension scheme change pilot for band five and six nurses

Stevenage, UK – 12 September 2016 – The Trust has launched a major recruitment campaign that seeks to encourage registered (band five and six) nurses, midwives and operating department practitioners (ODPs) to take up substantive roles at its hospitals, rather than working solely for agencies that charge the NHS a premium for their services.

Commenting on the campaign, the Trust’s director of workforce, Thomas Simons, said:

“From research that we have undertaken, some nurses choose to work for agencies only as they believe that this gives them greater flexibility over how and when they work, as well as higher rates of pay. They also recognise, however, that their training and career progression opportunities can be much more limited.

“Our campaign highlights our new approach to flexible working, which means that we are willing to engage with all working pattern requests with the aim of making them work for both our hospitals and our staff. We have great training programmes, which include developing those staff keen to develop towards, as well as move in to, more leadership roles.

“With regards to financial flexibility, one of the options that we are now making available to band five and six nurses, midwives and ODPs relates to their pension arrangements. Given that people working for agencies do not have access to the NHS Pension scheme, we are piloting allowing band five and six nursing and midwifery staff options scheme that allow them receive the contributions that the Trust would have made on their behalf had they joined either the NHS Pension or choose the NEST scheme.
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Mr Simons continued:

“The impact for those taking up the option to opt out of the NHS Pension is the equivalent of around a 12.5% rise in their salary – which goes a long way to eroding the perceived difference with agency pay rates. For staff choosing to join a NEST scheme, the uplift will be some 7.5%. People are, of course, free to choose the NHS Pension scheme should they wish to, with staff opting out auto-enrolled back in every 12 months unless they chose actively otherwise.

“In addition to these flexible, enhanced pay options, the Trust will be offering really flexible working patterns, different types of contracts, great training opportunities and excellent career progression. We hope that this combination will be more than enough to entice registered nursing and midwifery staff away from working solely for agencies.

“We also know that the quality of care we provide improves when the use of temporary staff is reduced. Although we are already doing quite well in this regard, with vacancy rates that are lower than many NHS organisations, there is more that we need to do – hence our latest campaign, which includes the NHS and NEST pension options for people to consider.

“The Trust recognises the importance of people making provision for their retirement, which is why this is a pilot and not a permanent change. Anyone wishing to take up the pension option would need to have taken independent financial advice on the matter. Also their opting out of the NHS Pension scheme will last for one year, with people re-enrolled automatically in to the scheme unless they seek to opt out – and again show that they have taken the appropriate advice. Also staff who have opted out are free to join the NHS Pension scheme at any point in their 12-month opted out period.
Mr Simons concluded:

“We have also been very sensitive to how this might be viewed, which is why we have undertaken an extensive briefing programme over the last few weeks. This has involved sharing our plans with our local, regional and national trades union partners representing nursing staff, MPs, NHS organisations locally and NHS Improvement. The initiative will be reviewed formally in a year’s time.”

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