

National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland

Remobilisation of Volunteering in NHSScotland

Introduction

Volunteering has an important role to play across NHSScotland but the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the levels of volunteering activity. At the beginning of the pandemic levels of volunteering within NHSScotland reduced significantly in order to ensure the safety of volunteers. Some new volunteering roles have emerged during this time, for example to support the flu vaccination programme and more recently the COVID-19 vaccination programme. However, a large proportion of volunteer roles across NHSScotland remain stood down since March 2020.

The Scottish Government published its Coronavirus (COVID-19): timetable for easing restrictions (01 April 2021) and its Coronavirus (COVID-19): Strategic Framework update - February 2021 setting out its plans to restore, in a phased way, greater normality to our everyday lives. In light of these documents, the National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland has reviewed current guidance and outlined a number of recommendations, options and approaches for NHS boards to consider in the remobilisation of volunteering.

It is the responsibility of each NHS board to implement appropriate actions and to ensure that their duty of care towards patients, staff and volunteers is adhered to.

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It is the responsibility of each NHS board to implement appropriate actions and to ensure that their duty of care towards patients, staff and volunteers is adhered to. This paper should be considered in conjunction with the supporting Guidance on Remobilisation of Volunteering in NHSScotland which provides further detail for NHS boards to consider.

Phased and gradual remobilisation of volunteering

Many services, patients and the currently 'stood down' volunteers will benefit from safe and measured return of volunteering.

Due care and attention should be paid to the [Scottish Government Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Scotland's Strategic Framework](#). The framework, along with the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): timetable for easing restrictions](#) should be used to guide the safe and measured return of volunteering in NHS boards.

Scottish Government updated [shielding advice and support](#) (22 March 2021) also gives details to support informed decision making.

Volunteering Roles

The delivery of health and care services has changed significantly during the course of the pandemic. NHS boards may wish to undertake a review of their volunteering programmes, and take forward any good practice or learning gathered.

It is possible that roles which existed for volunteers pre-pandemic may no longer be required, or will require to be adapted to fit with new guidance or models of care. In addition, the need for new roles may have arisen during the course of the pandemic.

Risk assessment

NHS boards have a duty of care to their volunteers under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Existing volunteer role risk assessments will be indicative of actions necessary in certain environments. As a priority the National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland recommends that:

Recommendation

Risk assessments for volunteering programmes and roles should be reviewed and updated accordingly by NHS boards.

Recommendation

NHS boards should consider implementing a risk assessment process for individuals in addition to existing risk assessments for programmes / services / roles.

Re-introduction of 'stood down' volunteers

Many existing volunteers have been 'stood down' from their roles for over 12 months. Care should be taken to consider the support and training needs of this group of volunteers.

Many changes are likely to have taken place which will impact on how volunteering can be carried out safely. Good communication and enhanced support for volunteers returning to a 'stood down' role is paramount, some volunteers may experience worry and anxiety about returning to a healthcare environment to carry out their volunteer role.

Some volunteers may choose not to return to their role, NHS boards should handle such conversations sensitively and ensure that volunteers are thanked for their contributions.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to an 'induction refresh' for volunteers who are returning to roles they previously carried out.

Recommendation

Volunteers may require to be provided with an updated role description and should have access to appropriate levels of support, training and guidance in advance of returning to volunteering.

Recruitment of new volunteers

It is possible that a proportion of previously engaged volunteers may not return to their previous volunteer role, and as a result NHS boards may need to recruit new volunteers.

During the course of 2021 the Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme will be rolling out online volunteer application functionality in the Volunteer Information System to all NHS boards who wish to use it. This will alleviate some of the administrative burden related to data entry of volunteer application forms.

Recommendation

A key component of volunteer management is the recruitment process. Included within it are a number of steps to assess the suitability of the volunteer for the role, to check their identity and carry out necessary safeguarding checks. NHS boards should ensure that their recruitment processes are proportionate to the current COVID-19 level in their area, only taking steps to fast track the process during periods of particular challenge.

Recommendation

NHS boards should consider the induction and training requirements for new volunteers, and how these can be delivered safely and effectively while still being accessible.

Where training is delivered in a virtual environment digital exclusion and accessibility issues should be explored, with suitable alternatives such as paper based training materials or telephone based training available.

Supporting volunteers

The pandemic will have long lasting effects on the mental health and wellbeing of the population. While volunteering can reduce social isolation and improve social connections and confidence it is important to remain mindful of volunteers' mental health and wellbeing. NHS boards may wish to consider:

- Volunteer access to employee helpline/counselling services
- Cascading mental wellbeing resources to volunteers

NHS boards should also communicate the same information to third sector agencies engaged in delivering services in NHS settings or on behalf of the NHS board.

Recognising volunteers

The contribution of volunteers right across society should not go unrecognised, this is especially important now. The National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland encourages all NHS boards to recognise the contribution of volunteers by engaging in [Volunteers Week](#) activity and saying thank you to those who give the gift of time to support NHSScotland.

Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme

The programme continues to provide [support, advice and guidance](#) to NHS boards on all aspects to volunteering, helps make volunteering in the NHS a safe, supportive and positive experience for all volunteers and the people they come into contact with.

During 2021, the programme will:

- Facilitate regular peer support and practice development sessions on a range of topics and themes for any staff who are involved in the management of volunteers in NHSScotland.
- Continue to encourage the use of the [Volunteering Community of Practice](#). An online space for staff involved in volunteer management to discuss issues, share resources and publications which may be of interest. Staff can also access information on training sessions and webinars to support their use of Volunteer Information System.

- Review and develop the range of guidance, toolkits and practical guides to support volunteer managers to deliver high quality volunteering programmes.

“Volunteering is a choice. A choice to give time or energy, a choice undertaken of one’s own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary.”

[Volunteering for All](#), Scottish Government 2019