

Executive Search Case Study - The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

When Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust decided to recruit a Director of Patient Experience and Nursing, they wanted as wide a field of candidates as possible.

They used the NHS Leadership Academy Executive Search service to help fill the role, and were pleased with the results. CEO Shane DeGaris said the Trust normally prefers to use recruitment agencies sparingly if the appointment can be dealt with in-house, but he found NHS Executive Search to be an excellent service and he would use it again.

“In our case a long-standing Director of Nursing had left and we needed a new impetus, so we decided to use external help. We had been disappointed by using commercial search firms for executive appointments when all they seemed to do was email the familiar suspects and charge a lot of money,” said Shane.

“The person who leads the NHS service has private sector experience and is very knowledgeable about the market. The team is also very up front about their limitations and what they can and cannot do, unlike many private sector firms.”

Shane felt that the NHS team managed the whole process professionally.

“From a customer perspective the logistics of the process were handled well. It ran smoothly and any unsuitable candidates were filtered out. The team gave us valuable advice but were neutral. They stuck to their brief and provided us with a really thorough short list of good candidates and it was then up to us to recruit the right person. We were extremely pleased with the list.”

Shane said that in any future appointments he would be more interested in the quality of the service and value for money than in whether the recruitment service was part of the NHS or outside of it. But he feels that ‘inside intelligence’ gives the NHS search team an advantage.

“That’s definitely a unique selling proposition for the NHS Executive Search service and is very important. Other agencies use databases and emails in the main, but the NHS team maintains a network of live contacts that is up-to-date. Recruiting for executive positions is also a lot of work for HR departments so when you need a very wide choice of candidates it’s useful to use a service like this.”

Professor Theresa Murphy, who was appointed to the role of Director of Nursing and Patient Experience, also found it to be an efficient and professional service.

“The process was similar to ones I have gone through before, but the team was very approachable and very transparent,” said Theresa. “In the pre-interview stages they were certainly very thorough – almost to the point of being forensic. They were rigorous about the testing and questioning.

“The final interview process was well handled. There were five candidates who had all been directors. We knew each other but we didn’t know that the others were on the shortlist, so the confidentiality aspect was well done. The calibre of the people doing the research was very high – they were very experienced and I was impressed with that. I thought the whole process was very thorough and fair and they treated me with great respect. The team gave me a real sense of being supported and valued, which was excellent.”

Claire Gore, Director of People at Hillingdon, was also pleased with the NHS search service and said the quality of the written reports was very high. There could also be ethical

imperatives to using an NHS service, she said, particularly when recruiting for a post where the majority of candidates are likely to require NHS experience.

“The key for me is that a large number of the people recruited will come from within the NHS - there aren’t many Director of Nursing or Chief Operating Officer posts that are filled from outside the NHS. So there’s not much point in taking on a headhunter who finds you a lot of people that aren’t really suitable. If good networks exist within the NHS and the NHS search service is comparable, then it’s a bonus. We might possibly use other agencies for non-executive posts if we wanted to tap into a wide external network but for executive appointments we would be more than happy to use the NHS Executive Search service in future.”