

Workforce Signpost Guide

Succession planning in children's palliative care services

Introduction

“The success of an organization is connected to the adequacy of its leadership progression that stems from succession strategies such as talent identification and internal leadership development.” (Sobol, Harkins, & Conley, 2007)¹

Together for Short Lives is the leading UK charity for all children with life-threatening and life-limiting conditions and all those who support, love and care for them – families, professionals and services, including children's hospices. Our work helps to ensure that children get the best possible care, wherever and whenever they need it.

We work closely with organisations and professionals that provide important lifeline services to children and families.

We offer resources and training to help them maintain consistent, high quality care from the moment a child is diagnosed, until their eventual death, and to continue supporting families for as long as they need it.

We know that children and young people's palliative care often involves very complex and rare conditions so developing high level skills is essential.

Together for Short Lives' workforce development activity directly supports children's palliative care

and hospice services to recruit and retain the right skill mix, and build a workforce that provides the best quality of care for children and families now and in the future.

This Workforce Signpost Guide contains contributions from a small group of experts with a national and international perspective, including human resources professionals and leaders of care, higher education and statutory services.

It is the first of a series of guides to support UK children's palliative care services with workforce issues – to aid development, quality and sustainability. In this guide we discuss succession planning in the sector, which if implemented successfully will promote continuity in leadership positions, increased retention rates and staff loyalty.

We hope that this will help the sector to deliver the best care and support to children and families, wherever and whenever they need it, so that they can make the most of their precious time together.



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1. Succession planning – what is it?

The children's palliative care sector requires a specific set of expertise. Maintaining high levels of skills and leadership can be a challenge if staff move out of the sector, retire, become ill, or more than one person at a time leaves.

Succession planning can be described as: “Any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organisation, division, department, or workgroup by making provision for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time.”²

Succession planning is a strategic process of recruitment, development and retention of key individuals in order to maximise an organisation's potential. This may include specifically targeted development for advanced practitioners. There is evidence that this is currently limited in organisations, along with managing talent and forecasting need.

It is estimated that 85% of organisations lack proper succession planning processes.³ In the children's palliative care sector this number has not been measured, however a healthcare leadership journal⁴ suggests that there is a gap in available evidence about succession planning for advanced practice in nursing.

There is little information about such planning being part of children's palliative care organisations' strategies.

Together for Short Lives has gathered feedback from experts in the children's palliative care sector workforce that tells us more can be done to attract, develop and retain key talent.

2. Succession planning – challenges

Some of the challenges facing organisations are summarised below:

- **Data**
There is little data about succession planning and outcomes in the children's palliative care sector. This makes it difficult to estimate the impact of gaps in planning on continuity and service quality. How should we measure the effect on organisational culture and experience if a significant number of people retire in a short space of time?
- **Vacancies**
Vacancies can place service continuity at risk and affect the ability to offer a significant service such as end of life care. Children and families might not be supported in their place of choice, or be delayed in getting a service.
- **Career development and education**
There is a lack of career development and educational opportunities for staff in the sector. This can be particularly challenging in regard to qualified staff with higher levels of experience and can affect recruitment and retention of skilled staff.
- **Skills or seniority**
If a children's palliative care organisation has plans to expand or develop a community service, someone with finance skills and change management experience may be the best choice for a leadership position rather than someone with senior clinical expertise. A decision on which is most appropriate for service sustainability will affect future workforce planning.
- **Leadership**
Poor succession planning could result in moving under-qualified workers into leadership roles when they are not prepared.⁵ This affects the quality of service delivered to children and families if they are being cared for by staff without the appropriate skill set or competences.



- **Investment**
Financial concerns and under-commitment of costs for career development can be a barrier to managing talent and retaining staff. Investment in this area can be seen as a luxury or add-on, rather than a sound investment.
- **Time and resources**
In one US study, hospice executives were found to be the biggest barrier to making succession plans and there was a lack of leadership in committing to succession planning. The executives said time and resources were barriers.⁶
- **Managerial direction**
There are examples where individuals have taken the initiative in succession planning but there can be a lack of supportive managerial direction, and the initiative could be lost if the individual moves on.⁷
- **Underpinning framework**
There is a lack of theoretical framework underpinning workforce planning, including competency models. There are sets of competencies, based on palliative care core capabilities, needed for excellent performance within the framework of job roles and responsibilities.

3. Succession planning – what can be done?

Identify key posts and funding

The first step in any leadership succession plan is to define the number and type of leadership positions necessary to achieve an organisation's goals and objectives.⁸

These can then be considered as key posts, with pathways designed to develop and retain skilled staff in them.

The organisation can then screen staff who will be successful in developing into these posts, actively keep and invest in these individuals, and in some cases convince them they will be right for the roles.

The incentive here is services will reap the benefits of business continuity. It has been demonstrated that people appointed into posts from inside an organisation perform better than outsiders and are less likely to leave of their own accord.⁹

Succession planning has associated costs, and targeted funding must be identified early. This is likely to include funding for administering framework and pathway development and maintaining updated job descriptions. Development costs may include training support, or support for some of the more creative suggestions further in this section.

Create pathways and frameworks for skill development

Succession pathways and frameworks should have common elements such as processes to identify organisational need (including competencies needed) and what Collins and Collins term “stellar individuals.”¹⁰

Leadership skills can be both innate and learned – leadership training and development must be active to promote loyalty among the chosen staff. It also needs to be strategic and reflect organisational need, going beyond a system of ‘time-served’ entitlement for all advanced practitioners.

Many organisations prefer to invest in all of their individuals, creating succession pathways for all staff roles, instead of focussing investment on high-potential roles. This takes more resource but can make workers feel more included throughout their careers.

Discuss creative solutions

A former CEO of McDonalds was known to tell his managers: “Give me the names of two people who could succeed you.” He promoted this approach after he succeeded two previous CEOs who had died suddenly.⁵

When Together for Short Lives asked an expert reference group about succession planning practice, one respondent from a children's palliative care service said: "I could not name any individual in the organisation currently with the necessary skill set to replace my role, despite investing in staff and developing their management and leadership skills. This is because they either do not want the role or they lack the breadth and depth of experience outside the hospice sector to engage in effective partnership working."

Here are some suggested solutions to this challenge:

Board involvement

Invest in time for your Board of trustees to monitor the progress of succession planning path ways. Sometimes the wrong people make succession decisions, and a Board can be a barrier to decision making if there is too much focus on the current legacy and not enough on the organisation's future goals.

Job packs and competences

Create a pack for every role, defining the necessary behaviours, attitude, skills, knowledge, experience and talent to succeed in it. Use the Royal College of Nursing Competence Framework for Children and Young People¹¹ or the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC)¹² document (both outline core competencies for education in children's palliative care) as a guide. Job packs will help employees understand what is expected of them in their current role and how to prepare to progress to other roles in the future.

Gap analysis

Use individual job packs in performance management processes to record a gap analysis of people in key posts. This will also help identify what individuals need to do to be ready for a different role, and how long it should take. Findings for senior positions can be reported regularly to the Board of trustees.

Planning ahead

Consider emergency succession planning alongside longer term structural planning. Keeping plans updated and ready to implement is especially important for unexpected staff departures, as well as being good practice. Aim to review the job frameworks of all key members of the leadership team every three years and job frameworks of other positions every five years.¹³ Having these plans ready will assist strategy discussions and increase contingency preparedness.

Mentoring

Build incentives into the role of mentoring rather than assume that managers can fulfil the role through their seniority. (A mentor supports an individual to successfully develop for future roles and builds a trusting relationship where issues can be discussed which may affect this.) The quality of preparation and support for senior staff is crucial to the success of transforming their role, and may require investment in mentor skills training for their peers.

Resources

Encourage senior managers to discuss potential development costs and mitigate these against the costs to business of unexpected departures of key skilled staff. They can then identify dedicated and committed funding for creating a succession planning pathway. (Resources needed for succession planning was cited as a significant barrier by our expert workforce reference group.)

Flexible retirement options

Develop flexible retirement options, such as the recent award-winning scheme in Wales which enabled eligible staff to work reduced hours while still receiving pension entitlements. This released hours for new staff while maintaining access to experience and expertise (often a challenge in children's palliative care).¹⁴

Creative recruitment

Consider recruitment of statutory colleagues who deliver palliative care but may not be part of a specialist service. Examples of fast-track palliative care training have been noted in adult services¹⁵ and may have a role in children's palliative care.



4. Succession planning – how can this guide support you?

In summary, here are some signposts to help you build your workforce to provide the very best quality sustainable care:

Gather workforce intelligence for the whole workforce, including age, job descriptions and skills required for future business growth

Identify key posts and leadership positions and actively plan to develop them into specific roles

Target specific resources for succession planning for development, admin support and pathway development

Invest in time for your Board of trustees to discuss the succession plan and identify any risks to the organisation

Match competence levels to job roles to identify gaps and strengths

Explore the possibility of creative solutions, for example partial retirement or rotational posts with partners

Together for Short Lives would like to hear your feedback on this signpost guide. If you have information to share on how it has been useful, or suggestions for further signpost guides please email

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