

# Perfect storm could sink the NHS warns Milton Keynes hospital boss

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The chief executive of Milton Keynes Hospital has told of his fears the NHS 'could sink' as it tries to cope with the perfect storm of rising demand, vacancies and the fact existing staff are suffering from burnout and ongoing well-being issues.

Professor Joe Harrison told Newcross Healthcare's Voice of Care podcast that measures are being rolled out at Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to try to combat the ongoing recruitment crisis in the sector, which has seen vacancies increase to near-record levels.

Staff are being offered meals for just £2, free car parking, the chance to choose when and how long they work and extended bereavement leave as part of series of innovative actions to keep people working within the NHS.

The hospital has partnered with nearby Buckingham University to set up the UK's first independent medical school to try and encourage more local people into the NHS.

Professor Harrison also called for better use of technology across the NHS, describing the sector as being 'miles behind' the rest of the country. Milton Keynes Hospital has recently pioneered robot surgery for certain surgical procedures, which has freed up 450 bed days, according to recent figures.

**On the subject of looking after staff and encouraging people to stay within the NHS, Professor Harrison said:**

"I think we are in danger of allowing the NHS to sink. A number of staff are still feeling the effects of that pandemic.

"Our NHS team were dealing with the unknown day in, day out, 24/7 for months. And it is that relentless pressure that has ultimately taken its toll on a number of people."

**On specific measures to ease the pressure on staff, Professor Harrison said:**

"We are one team at Milton Keynes University Hospital. We took a decision four years ago that we would not charge people to come to work by offering free car parking. We've expanded that now by putting solar panels across the site, we now enable staff to charge their electric cars for free.

"We recognize that there are going to be some significantly difficult times ahead economically. So, we have decided that we will play our part in providing members of the team with a healthy, affordable meal every day, and that is £2.

"We've also looked at those members of staff that just do not want to do full-time work anymore and who perhaps aren't able to. We still know that women carry the vast majority of childcare pressures in our society, whether we like it or not. So how do we support the 70% of our workforce that is female? And so, we're just, as I speak, bringing in an 'any hours contract'.

"The NHS has been focused on shift work and it says you can do an early or late or a 12-hour shift. That's not how millennials want to run their lives. It's not how individuals, post-pandemic, are thinking about work, and we have to flex and change that. And so, enabling staff to come in and do a couple of hours to come back from retirement, to do a couple of hours at times that suit them as well as the organization, has received unbelievable support from the team at MK.

"We've doubled bereavement leave at the hospital. If somebody very close to you dies, are you really going to be back at work in two weeks? The answer to that is very clearly no."

**On the partnership with Buckingham University, Professor Harrison said:**

"We recognize that all of the research shows that if people train locally, then they're more likely to, once they've qualified, stay locally. So back in 2015, we took a decision with Buckingham University to open our independent medical school, and what we've seen is several hundred doctors now qualifying over the years, and that really has been positive not only for those qualifying, but also in attracting great people to

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come and work at MKUH because they want to teach.”

Hosted by healthcare expert Suhail Mirza, the podcast episode featuring Professor Harrison is available now alongside previous episodes in the Voices of Care series on various platforms including [You Tube](#), Apple, Spotify and the [Newcross Healthcare](#) website.

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