Provide management training to stop NHS staff from leaving, says boss of London health trust

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Every person in the NHS who oversees the work of another should be properly trained in the art of people management.

In a candid conversation for Newcross Healthcare's *Voices of Care* podcast series, Professor Tim Orchard says management training at every level is key to ensuring the smooth-running of NHS facilities and to stop the health service from haemorrhaging valuable members of staff.

Professor Orchard, who is Chief Executive of Imperial College Healthcare, NHS Trust, told the podcast that one of the main issues raised by members of staff was their relationship with their immediate manager.

He said: "We've just launched a big program called 'Improvement through People Management', which is to try and upskill every single person who has responsibility for another human being in the organisation.

"A lot of what comes across my desk are situations where you can see that if they'd sorted it out at the first meeting, they could actually have taken something positive out of the situation. By the time it gets to me, you've got really entrenched views and it's really difficult to sort the problems out.

"So, I think building good relationships between managers and their teams is an incredibly important aspect. And it's an old HR truism, that people join an organisation and leave a manager."

Commenting on the impact of burn-out and low morale contributing to record shortages of NHS staff - currently there are more than 130,000 vacancies across the workforce in England - Professor Orchard acknowledged that wellbeing was also crucial to retaining staff.

He said: "Actually, the things that are really important to people are that they get food and drink when they're working, that they can take their breaks and that there is somebody vaguely looking out for them and making sure that that they are okay.

"One of the things that we focused on is thinking about staff rest areas. So, we've just spent part of £1.2 million refurbishing staff areas where all staff can go and actually just get a break away from their normal work environment.

We got students from King's College London in design to come and help us work on that. And they've been incredibly popular.

"They're not rocket science, but they do make a difference to people's daily lives."

Professor Orchard also talked about other support measures the Trust has implemented, including counselling and a scheme to help staff with the cost-of-living crisis, his commitment to diversity in recruitment and to levelling up career opportunities across the board.

Summing up his views on leadership in the NHS, he said:

"It's very tempting to assume that the way through all problems in the NHS is through heroic leadership. And of course, actually it's about building a coalition of people who have a common aim, which is generally in the health service to provide the best possible care they can for patients. And that requires a whole load of people to do a whole load of things. And so that heroic leadership model probably is not terribly effective, I think, for medical leadership.

"It's certainly a helpful thing to have some very senior clinical leaders and managers. And I think that at the top of NHS organisations it is a combination of leadership of the organisation and managing the services. But it would not be fair to say that only doctors can do that, or doctors are automatically going to be better."

Hosted by healthcare expert Suhail Mirza, the podcast episode featuring Professor Tim Orchard is

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