

# case study



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

## Friends Road Medical Practice



- **Sickness levels and staff retention rates are best in the area, down by 35%**
- **Customer Satisfaction ratings are at 86%**
- **Sound financial platform due to financial planning and excellent employment policies.**

### Background

Size:	17 people
Sector:	General Practice – NHS (Healthcare)
Location:	Croydon
Status:	First achieved Investors in People recognition in 1998; awarded Investors in People Champion status in 2005

### The organisation

Friends Road Medical Practice provides extensive general and personal medical services in a primary care setting to a catchment of 8,500 people in Croydon, South London.

Although the Practice has not always been its current location, its history goes back to the early 1930s, well before the introduction of the NHS in 1948.

The team of 17 at the Practice has always been committed to ensuring that patients and customers are cared for in a friendly environment by professional, competent and motivated staff.

As part of the NHS, Friends Road Medical Practice has limited resources yet it must find a balance between providing much-needed high quality services to patients and nurturing a progressive and welcoming working environment.

*“The Practice now has one of the best staff retention rates in the area and the lowest level of sickness with rates down by 35 per cent. We see best practice as a great motivator and by sharing this with other organisations; we have been able to encourage 20 other Practices within two neighbouring PCT areas to embark on the Investors in People process themselves.”*

**Karen Northwood, Managing Partner**



## The challenge

Back in 1998, the Practice desperately needed to develop some kind of framework that would enable it to develop and implement robust policies and procedures, whilst ensuring there was a process for developing the team members to their full potential.

The partners at the Practice felt that a renewed focus on employees and the working environment could bring about real benefits in what is very often a stressful place to work. It was starting with a blank canvas as it had no policies or procedures in place and there was no training or development of employees.

"We chose Investors in People because we believed it would improve our recruitment and retention processes," said Karen Northwood, Managing Partner. "We also wanted to develop the concept of being a 'learning' organisation with highly motivated, competent staff in place. We believed that by achieving a recognised quality standard we could really 'add value' to the organisation and its people."

As well as focusing on its employees, the Practice felt it needed to develop a business plan incorporating its vision, along with clearly-defined aims and objectives. It reasoned that a more formal process would enable it to facilitate the development of the business to become a nurturing, forward-thinking organisation that would put it at the forefront of primary care provision.

## The strategy

"Working with Investors in People helped us put together a clear business plan that dealt with both short and long term objectives," says Karen. "This meant we were able to plan more effectively through the development of the business strategy and by becoming, we believe, a learning organisation."

Part of the process for the Practice has been to ensure each team member has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. This has meant involving them at all levels in the business planning process and empowering them to contribute to the ongoing development of the organisation. This has led to staff receiving good training and having access to a comprehensive continuous learning and development programme.

"Transforming the recruitment and retention process was a key challenge for us," says Karen. "We now have clear policies and procedures in place and all employees are given a comprehensive employment pack when starting a post. As a result of Investors in People, we have also introduced person specifications, a detailed induction programme and job evaluation along with a learning and

development strategy."

Friends Road now has an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning and development throughout the organisation. It has a continuous in-house training programme, which is complemented by external training and development initiatives.

## The results

The Practice recognised that it was essential to both value and develop its greatest asset, its people. By successfully implementing the strategies, it began to see continuous improvements in terms of performance and effectiveness throughout the team. This in turn meant the team was keen to learn and develop themselves and wanted to have ownership of the process. It has enabled the Practice to develop a culture of continuous learning and development and this has inspired the team to want to grow.

As a direct result of these initiatives, Friends Road has seen a significant reduction in employee turnover. It used to have at least two to three vacancies each financial year whereas as today its 'newest' employee has been there for almost four years! The Practice now has one of the best staff retention rates in the area and the lowest level of sickness with rates down by 35 per cent.

"The level of service our patients are now receiving has resulted in a significant improvement of customer satisfaction levels across the whole Practice," says Karen. "The local and national average is approximately 75 per cent; our Practice has improved its performance by an average of 11 per cent and has an approval rating that averages 86 per cent. We are consistently in the top five per cent of all Practices."

"We are now seen as a leading Practice at the forefront of primary care and as such the PCT has employed some of our team members to work on a consultancy basis as advisers to them and other Practices. All of this means, although we are not a commercial business, we have an enhanced financial position from which to build our Practice due to sound business and financial planning as well as excellent employment policies."

As a result of sharing best practice with other organisations, Friends Road has been able to encourage 20 other Practices within two neighbouring PCT areas to embark on the Investors in People process for themselves. It made all the appropriate contacts on their behalf, organised funding and facilitated the development of six workshops and a support network.

"Everyone lives and breathes the culture and no-one has to work hard at it," concludes Karen. "Investors in People has become the umbrella for all that we do and much of our culture now seems to come naturally."

