

## How to...

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### **Grow your DSNs**

**A quick guide to recruiting, developing and supporting diabetes specialist nurses**

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#### Use this guide to:

- Help you make a case for recruiting diabetes specialist nurses.
- Build a culture of continuous development for your diabetes specialist nurses that encourages progression and inspires innovation.
- Influence decision makers to support and build your diabetes specialist nurse workforce.

#### This guide is for:

- Anyone involved in developing and leading the diabetes team.
- Anyone planning or struggling to recruit diabetes specialist nurses.

**In this guide we will refer to both adult and paediatric diabetes specialist nurses as DSNs.**

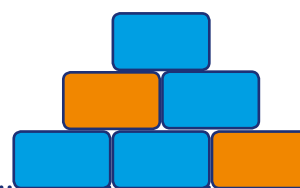
# Why develop DSNs?

Diabetes specialist nurses (DSNs)<sup>1</sup> are key to meeting the health and care needs of the steadily rising number of people living with diabetes in the UK. DSNs reduce length of stay in hospital, support better self-management, improve patient satisfaction and are cost effective<sup>2</sup>.

In 2016<sup>2</sup>, our DSN workforce survey reported significant present and future shortages in the workforce, growing difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled staff and a trend towards downgrading specialist posts. Without urgent action to develop a sustainable DSN workforce, these problems look set to get worse.

Use these top tips collected from healthcare professionals across the UK to help you recruit, develop and retain DSNs in your team, whatever step in the process you're at.

## Step 1 Building the case for change



**A creative and strong business case is key.** It must prove that in terms of both patient outcomes and cost savings, what you're asking for is better than what you've already got. What's the risk to patients if nothing changes? A good balance of data and patient stories will make for a much more effective case. Include evidence of any incidents, near misses, and complaints owing to lack of DSNs. It's important to highlight why having DSNs is so important.



### Top tip

**“Look at the TREND competencies<sup>3</sup> – it can help you highlight what makes DSNs skilled and crucial for providing good diabetes care.”**

Debbie Hicks, Co-Chair of TREND, Nurse Consultant – Diabetes, Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust.

**Don't underestimate the power of good relationships.** A business case does not just end with the document you create. Having positive relationships with colleagues and involving people with diabetes gives you huge influencing power. Start building relationships by just saying hello.



### Top tip

**“Decision makers may sometimes be too far removed from the realities of delivering care, so inviting senior managers, CCG leads, finance leads or whoever makes the decision, to sit in clinics to observe clinicians and sending some time with the team may make it easier to make the case.**

**Meeting with the clinical leads to provide details of the service is also very important. Diabetes may not always be the priority so this can help them understand the nature of the service delivery and where gaps and risks are.”**

Jackie Angelo-Gizzi, Clinical Nurse Specialist Paediatric Diabetes, ENH NHS Trust.

<sup>1</sup> Both adult and paediatric diabetes specialist nurses are collectively referred to as DSNs in this guide.

<sup>2</sup> **Diabetes Specialist Nursing 2016 Workforce** survey, <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/professionals/position-statements-reports/healthcare-professional-staffing-competency/dsn-survey-2016>

## Step 1 Building the case for change

**Be open to compromise.** Remember that achieving something is better than nothing at all. Make the best of what you can get and build on it. Decide what you can and cannot compromise on and stick to that.

**Know when to write a business case.** Building a case for change and writing a business case are not the same. Business cases are part of the process and are often not the most important part. Building relationships and engaging the right people early on, can help speed up the approval of your business case.



### Top tip

**“Always seek advice from colleagues who have been successful with their business case to find out how they did it. This may save a lot of business case ping-pong between departments.”**

Jackie Angelo-Gizzi, Clinical Nurse Specialist Paediatric Diabetes, ENH NHS Trust. Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust.

## Step 2 Recruiting the right people



**Revisit the skill mix of the team.** If you're having difficulty recruiting people with the right experience, creating training posts may be a good alternative. Develop a job plan that incorporates the progression of a DSN and make sure they have the right support in place.

### Case study



Derby Teaching Hospitals have developed a core competency booklet that all their Band 6 DSNs have to work through. These can be useful tools in mapping the progression and development of your nurses.

You can view the booklet here: <http://bit.ly/derby-dsn-competency>

**The interview is crucial in helping you to recruit the right people.** Think about how they may fit into the team. While knowledge and experience is important, it can be developed on the job. Qualities like enthusiasm, a positive attitude and a willingness to participate and progress can't be learnt.



### Top tip

**“When trying to identify the right people, ask yourself – has the person mentioned diabetes in their interview?”**

Margaret Bannister, Nurse Consultant in Diabetes Care, University of Bradford.

## Step 3 Developing your DSNs



**Consider talent-spotting or recruiting link nurses.** Sometimes it may be more effective to upskill and recruit internally. Look for nurses from your own trust who you can develop, for example, getting junior nurses to do a secondment in a diabetes unit to gain insight into the role of the DSN. Certain trusts have created rotational programmes within a specialist area to allow junior nurses the opportunity to develop an interest and also begin to specialise.

### Case study



The Diabetes Ward Champions programme at Kingston Hospital is a development programme for qualified ward nurses who are interested in diabetes and would like to make a real difference to diabetes care on their ward. It gives them the skills and knowledge to allow them to improve diabetes inpatient care.

The second part of the programme is for the individual to put into practice the theory and make a positive change to their clinical environment. They are then entered into a competition to win a trip to the Diabetes UK Professional Conference. Mentorship and support throughout the programme is provided and regular network meetings with other Diabetes Ward Champions provide a safe space in which reflection and networking with like-minded colleagues can take place.

### Case study



In order to address issues with recruiting to the diabetes specialist team and to the diabetes ward, Lister Hospital used maternity leave funding to develop a pilot rotational opportunity for the registered nurses.

The programme provided opportunity for:

- training and education
- developing good working relationships between ward nurses and the diabetes consultants, with positive lasting impact when nurses returned to cover diabetes wards
- talent-spotting.

Anecdotal evidence indicated that the pilot was a success. The nurses who took part fed back to say it had been a good learning opportunity and also developed their confidence in managing diabetes on the wards. Although the pilot had to be ended earlier than planned, the trust did see the value and have agreed to continue it when circumstances allow.

This will not only enable the diabetes specialist team to identify DSNs of the future and nurture their interest but also attract nurses who wish to train to be DSNs to work on the diabetes ward in the trust.

### Step 3 Developing your DSNs

**New recruits will need time to get comfortable in their role, where they feel confident asking questions and delivering care.** It's crucial they get the chance to fully understand the service and how to deliver good care. Make sure they shadow other members of the team, sit in on local structured education programmes, and go to joint clinics and transition clinics.

**Mentoring is key in making sure that new recruits are both comfortable and competent in their roles.** A mentor can help with both professional development and support to navigate the challenges of providing the kind of support people with diabetes and their families need from a DSN. Make sure there is mentorship package for new starters to work through so they are supported to develop their confidence and skills over a period of time. Protecting time for senior nurses to mentor and nurture is also necessary to make sure this happens.

**Clear work plans are important.** They will allow you to protect the role of the DSN without stifling their development. Well thought through job plans can support in protecting time for personal development and prevent deskilling.

#### Case study



The DSN team at York Hospital have a structured job plan with dedicated clinical activity time which usually consists of clinics that are already set up. Time is also made for telephone triage, so everyone is clear when they need to answer calls from primary care colleagues. One session a week is built in for clinical support, shadowing or development to allow the continued professional development of staff.

### Step 4 Retaining your DSNs



**Acknowledge success.** With limited resources, rewarding good work can be difficult. Something as simple as acknowledgement in one-to-ones or more widely in team meetings can work as powerful motivators for growth. Think about offering flexitime to allow your DSNs the autonomy to plan their day, allowing for later start time or later finish time, so they can support their work life balance. Simple incentives like this can make your team feel valued and appreciated.

**Team culture will have a significant impact on the growth and retention of your DSNs.**

An environment where new members are challenged and are encouraged to challenge back, have access to senior members of the team and are supported in practising reflectively will allow them to continually develop. The more support they receive and the more opportunities for development, the more likely they are to remain.

## Step 4 Retaining your DSNs

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### Top tip

**“Encourage your DSNs to audit and present their work as much as possible. Encourage them to become a Diabetes UK volunteer or attend the conference. This not only serves as good opportunity for both professional and personal development but continually builds the case for the DSN team as well.”**

Debbie Stanisstreet, Lead Nurse for Diabetes and Endocrinology, Lister Hospital

**Support your existing DSNs into management.** It's important to have someone taking responsibility for the teams and have a strategic vision. Your existing senior DSNs may be best placed to do this as they will know the staff and will have the right understanding of the team. This will also act as inspiration for junior nurses.

# Further resources

Diabetes UK position statements on:

- defining a diabetes specialist nurse for adult services.
- a career and education framework for diabetes specialist nursing.

[www.diabetes.org.uk/dsn-outcomes-costs](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/dsn-outcomes-costs)

Further information here:

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/professionals/position-statements-reports/healthcare-professional-staffing-competency/diabetes-specialist-nurses-improving-patient-outcomes-and-reducing-costs>

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You can download this and our other guides at  
[www.diabetes.org.uk/how-to-guides](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/how-to-guides)



You can get more information about how to grow your DSNs by emailing  
[sharedpractice@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:sharedpractice@diabetes.org.uk)

**[www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)**

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