



NHS Scotland Volunteer Impact Series: Insights from the Frontline - NHS Staff Perspectives

June 2024

© Healthcare Improvement Scotland 2018
June 2024

This document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence. This allows for the copy and redistribution of this document as long as Healthcare Improvement Scotland is fully acknowledged and given credit. The material must not be remixed, transformed or built upon in any way. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

www.healthcareimprovementscotland.scot

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Context.....	4
Participation rates.....	4
Results.....	5
Conclusions.....	14
Recommendations.....	15
Appendix 1.....	16

Executive Summary

In early 2024, volunteer managers from NHS Ayrshire & Arran, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside worked together to create a set of national questions. The aim was to gather data on the experiences of NHS staff who work alongside volunteers in their wards and departments. This work was supported by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme Team, who have analysed the entire data set.

The purpose of the survey was to take a consistent approach to gathering data on the perspectives of staff who work alongside volunteers. This supports our shared ambition to be able to better evidence the difference that volunteers make. This report forms part of the [NHS Scotland Volunteer Impact Series](#) highlights the difference that NHS Scotland volunteers make across the health system.

The survey generated 251 responses in total, reflecting the views of staff across 46 NHS Scotland locations in five NHS boards.

Findings

The findings from the pilot survey have given very useful insights into the positive impact that involving volunteers has on NHS staff. Based on the perspectives of NHS staff who participated in the survey, we can conclude that volunteers contribute to a range of benefits for both staff and patients.

The most significant finding from the report was that 99% of staff who responded to the survey said that involving volunteers is worth the investment of their time. Of that, 84% also said that they spent less than 30 minutes per day providing support to volunteers. This would then suggest that volunteers provide a high level of benefit, for minimal investment of time

Similarly, 69% of staff reported that involving volunteers reduces their levels of stress, alongside 26% who told us that volunteers help to support their mental health and wellbeing at work. Staff also reported better quality patient care, improved patient wellbeing and improved communication between staff and patients as outlined below:

65% agreed that volunteers help staff deliver better quality of care.

56% agreed that volunteers free them up to do other tasks.

45% reported that volunteers improved responsiveness to patient and visitor needs.

35% said that volunteers improve communication between staff and patients.

29% told us volunteers support their professional development and / or gave them supervisory experience.

23% told us that volunteers contribute to reduced number of complaints from patients.

Conclusions

The findings support volunteers as valuable partners in delivering quality care and outcomes for patients and visitors in healthcare and that the time required to support volunteers is minimal in comparison to their impact.

Recommendations

Five recommendations have been identified:

- Share the findings of this report with the NHS Scotland Volunteering Advisory Board, Executive and Strategic Leads for Volunteering in all NHS boards and members of the Volunteering Practitioners network.
- NHS boards who participated in the pilot survey should share the findings with their volunteers.
- Use the findings of this report, combined with the findings from the 2024 NHS Scotland Volunteer Experience Survey to communicate the impact of NHS Scotland Volunteering more widely across NHS Scotland, Scottish Government, Health & Social Care and Third Sector.
- Gather feedback on the report and identify improvements which could be made to the survey structure and questions.
- The NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme should embed this survey as part of their Volunteering Impact Series on an annual basis, working to encourage as many NHS boards to participate and share their local data with the programme team for analysis and reporting.

Context

In early 2024, volunteer managers from NHS Ayrshire & Arran, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside worked together to create a set of national questions. The aim was to gather data on the experiences of NHS staff who work alongside volunteers in their wards and departments. This work was supported by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme Team who have analysed the entire data set.

The purpose of the pilot survey was to take a consistent approach to gathering data on the perspectives of staff who work alongside volunteers. This supports our shared ambition to be able to better evidence the difference that volunteers make.

A survey via MS Forms was used to gather the data. The survey was open from 15 April 2024 – 17 May 2024. The NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme Team provided a briefing paper for participating NHS boards which is included in this report as Appendix 1.

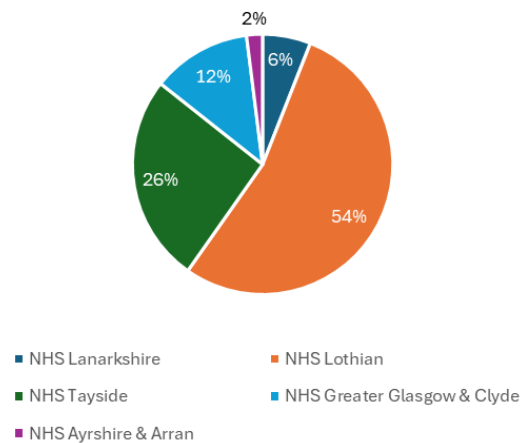
This report forms part of the NHS Scotland Volunteer Impact Series which reports on the difference that NHS Scotland volunteers make across the health system.

Participation rates

The survey generated 251 responses in total, reflecting the views of staff across 46 NHS Scotland locations in five NHS boards.

NHS Lanarkshire	15
NHS Lothian	135
NHS Tayside	65
NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde	31
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	5

Figure 1 - Participation rates



99% (n=249) of respondents provided their job title when completing the survey. The majority of respondents identified themselves as Nursing & Midwifery staff (53%), Support Workers (15%) or as Administrative Services (15%).

The remaining staff identified themselves as Allied Health Professionals (8%) or as Healthcare Sciences, Support Services, Mental Health / Psychology, Executive Leadership, Spiritual Care, Medicine and Pharmacy (9%).

Results

Q1. Do you feel having volunteers in your area is a benefit to your department?

93% (n=247) of staff surveyed responded to this question.

- 93% (n=230) of staff reported that they feel volunteers bring benefit to their department, while 1% (n=3) felt that volunteers do not bring benefits.
- A further 6% (n=14) chose option 'other' and provided comments relating to their experiences.

Yes	93% (n=230)
No	1% (n=3)
Other comments	6% (n=14)

"They are able to talk to the patients and spend time with them if we are too busy".

"It saves time which can be put into patient care".

Q2. In what ways do you feel having volunteers in your area is a benefit to you personally as staff? (please tick all that apply)

Staff were invited to choose how they feel that volunteers provide benefits to them from a list of potential benefits which were identified by volunteer managers. Respondents could select multiple benefits. Staff were also able to add their own benefits via free text which were themed into categories.

- 39% of staff felt that volunteers free them up to do clinical tasks, and a further 17% also felt that volunteers freed up non-clinical staff to do other tasks.
- 26% of staff felt that volunteers help to support their health and wellbeing whilst at work.
- 19% of staff felt that volunteers support their professional development, and 10% said that volunteers gave them experience of supervising others.

Figure 2 – Benefits felt personally by staff of having volunteers in their area



A selection of comments received for Q2:

“Allows staff members to fully concentrate with patients without having interruptions.”

“I can focus on more patient personal care.”

“By helping at mealtimes it frees me up to do other jobs/tasks.”

“Our volunteer supports me to continue QI work relating to meaningful activity and it brings me joy to see the impact she makes to our patients.”

“Can free me to do other things like going to pharmacy to hand in scripts.”

“Allows reception staff to deal with more complex enquiries from patients/visitors.”

“They are another support system for patients and their families.”

“Improves moral of patients and ward team which has positive impact on my role also.”

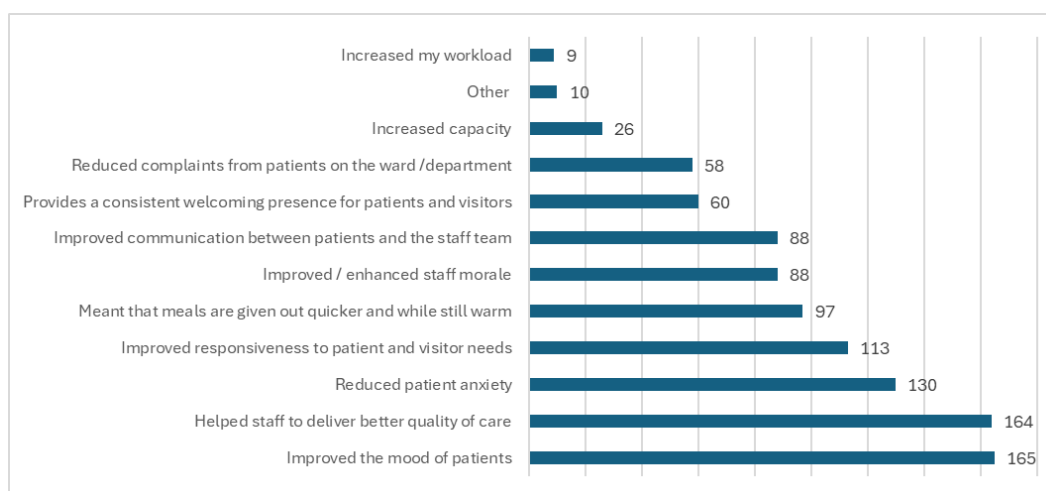
“Without [volunteer] I would have given up my job. She keeps me sane.”

Q3. Having volunteers in my area has (please tick all that apply):

Staff were invited to identify the impact of having volunteers in their area from a list of potential impacts which were identified by volunteer managers. Respondents could select multiple impacts. Staff were also able to add their own benefits via free text, these responses were themed into categories.

- 66% of staff said that volunteers improved the mood of patients, and a further 52% said that volunteers also reduced patient anxiety.
- 65% of staff said that volunteers help staff to deliver better quality of care, and a further 35% said that volunteers also improved communication between patients and staff.
- 45% of staff said that volunteers contributed to improved responsiveness to patients and visitor needs by staff, and a further 23% said that volunteers also reduced the number of complaints the ward or department received.

Figure 3 - Impact of having volunteers



Q4. How confident do you feel in knowing what tasks volunteers in your area can and cannot do?

99% (n=248) of staff surveyed responded to this question.

Staff were invited to share their levels of confidence around what tasks volunteers are permitted to carry out. This is important as volunteering activity should complement and add value to the care and support being provided to patients and their families and not be used as a substitute for paid staff.

- 93% (n=232) of staff reported feeling very or fairly confident in this area.
- 7% (n=16) did not feel confident in knowing what tasks volunteers are permitted to carry out.

Q5. Is there anything you feel volunteers could do that they don't currently do in your area?

Staff were invited to share their thoughts on activities or tasks that they feel volunteers could do that they don't currently do. Suggestions were themed into categories as outlined below.

Activities with patients (games, walks for fresh air)	21
Support patients to eat and drink	9
Moving and handling	1
Cleaning	6
Clinical tasks	3
Rehabilitation	2
Emotional Support	2
Structure	2
Administration	7
Gardening	2
Driving	1
Other comments	15

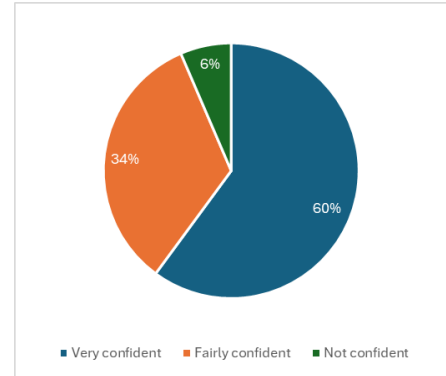
**Please note that some of the suggestions given by staff would be considered as inappropriate for volunteers to carry out as they are tasks which should be carried out by paid staff only.*

Q6. How confident do you feel in reaching out to the Voluntary Services Team about volunteering in your department?

98% (n=247) of staff responded to this question.

- 60% (n=150) staff felt very confident to reach out to the Voluntary Services Team for support, while 34% (n=74) felt fairly confident.
- 6% (n=23) of staff did not feel confident to reach out for support from the Voluntary Services Team.

Figure 4 - Staff confidence in reaching out to the Voluntary Services Team

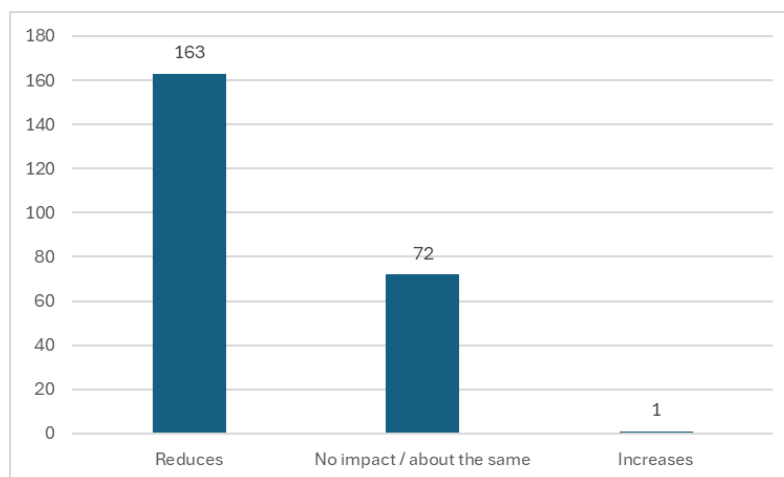


Q7. Do you feel having volunteers in your area reduces or increases your levels of stress?

94% (n=236) of staff responded to this question

- 69% (n=163) of staff reported that volunteers reduce their levels of stress, while 30% (n=72) felt that there was no impact on their levels of stress as a result of volunteer involvement.
- Less than 1% (n=1) of staff reported that involving volunteers increased their stress levels.

Figure 5 - Impact on staff stress levels of having volunteers in their area

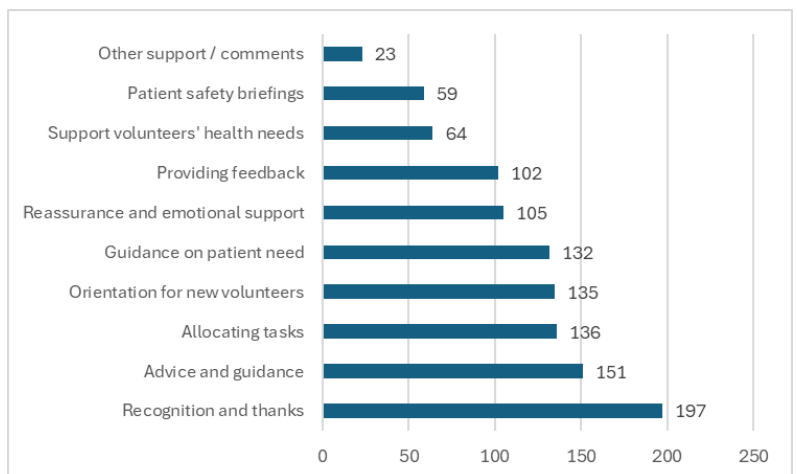


Q8. What types of support do you provide to volunteers (tick all that apply)?

Staff were invited to identify the support they provide to volunteers from a list of options which were identified by volunteer managers. Respondents could select multiple answers. Staff were also able to add their own benefits via free text, these responses were themed into categories.

- 78% of staff reported that they provide support to volunteers via giving recognition and thanks, further to this 43% reported that they support volunteers through the provision of feedback.
- 54% reported that they provide orientation for new volunteers and 60% also provide advice and guidance to volunteers.
- 54% of staff reported that they allocate tasks to volunteers, with a further 23% reporting that they involve volunteers in patient safety briefings.
- 42% reported that they provide reassurance and emotional support to volunteers, with a further 25% supporting volunteers health needs.

Figure 6 - Types of support provided by staff to volunteers

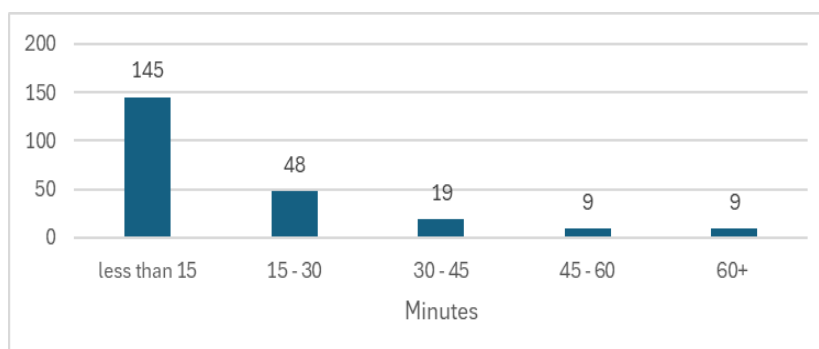


Q9. How much time do you spend supporting volunteers on a typical day?

92% (n=230) of staff surveyed responded to this question.

- 84% (n=193) of staff spend less than 30 minutes supporting volunteers per day.
- 12% (n=28) of staff spend between 30 – 60 minutes per day providing support to volunteers.
- 4% (n=9) of staff reported spending 60+ minutes per day supporting volunteers.

Figure 7 - Staff time spent supporting volunteers on a typical day

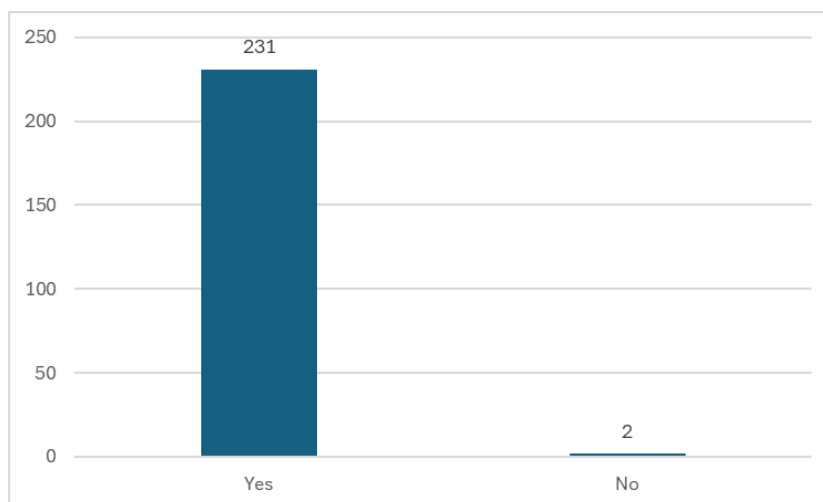


Q10. Is involving volunteers worth the investment of your time?

94% (n=233) of staff surveyed responded to this question.

- 99% (n=231) of staff said that involving volunteers in their work is worth the investment of their time.
- 1% (n=2) said that involving volunteers was not worth the investment of their time.

Figure 8 - Is involving volunteers worth the investment of staff time?



Staff were invited to explain why they responded to Q10 in the way they did - 194 comments were received. A selection of quotes from staff:

"After initial orientation, volunteers are happy to touch base with Nurse in charge on arrival and then know the patients and ward well enough to use their own initiative and fill their time with meaningful activities."

"Although first couple of sessions needs investment of my time, when the volunteer returns weekly thereafter that time is made back and more with the number of patients they see in following weeks and conduct exercises with."

"Although I do not have a huge amount of direct time with the volunteers, the clinical staff on the dialysis units do. Our collective time is hugely worthwhile in investing in the volunteers as they add massive value to our team and department. I actively encourage the discussion of volunteers in our senior meetings to ensure staff are supportive and engaged with those supporting in Renal services."

"Having a volunteer is such a benefit to our ward as we have a very busy reception. We have different clinics running, therefore our volunteer is always happy to assist in showing patients where to go."

"Having volunteers within the hospital most definitely makes the patient care and experience far better in lots of aspects which helps every other department to run more smoothly and efficiently."

"Helping at mealtimes helps the flow of the day and talking to the patients ups the patients mood."

"I think the time invested by others is important as they are having a huge impact on morale and wellbeing."

"If we invest time showing and supporting volunteers with the simple tasks it allows us spend time with patients doing the diagnostic tests. They are a huge support to our service."

"Improve running of ward. If we spend 30 min showing volunteers what to do for 6 months it's a great investments of time."

"In our ward having volunteers, help in many ways, from tidying tables, going round talking to patients, sitting with distressed patients and many more which all frees up nurses to increase time for patient care."

"It's really helpful when volunteers answer the door, just chat to the mums, give them fresh water, see if they need anything. Even just making a fuss of their babies, helps make the patients safe, that they matter and supported. Chatting to parents, getting water etc can often be missed by staff who are busy doing medicines, admissions, discharges etc."

"The volunteers that work in OPD4 are very pleasant and extremely willing to help out in any way they can. Apart from taking patient notes to the correct area in our department, they will escort patients to the correct department. I feel they benefit the running of our department."

"They provide additional support to patients and staff, spending additional with our patients and also freeing up staff to undertake tasks that can be a struggle to get to given workloads and time constraints. The volunteers have been of real value to 103."

"Volunteers add a massive to the patients in our ward. Our OT has coordinated this input and we have volunteers throughout the week. Patients are very complimentary about the value they add to their treatment."

"Volunteers are almost looking in at the situation from an outside point of view and can spot changes in presentation, behaviours and reactions that full time staff may not. They increase both patient and staff moral whilst in the ward. The health of our patients is increased overall as volunteers have time to spend with a person on a one to one basis and really make them feel listened too, respected and dignified."

"Volunteers provide a huge help to patients and staff in many ways, driving, talks, teas, and the service provided would suffer without this interaction from the volunteers and therefore investing in volunteers is worth my investment. This is worth it for what the volunteer gets out of their role also."

"Yes because it enhances my leadership skills as well as benefitting how the service is run."

"My /our workload is high demanding for the little work they do. sorry."

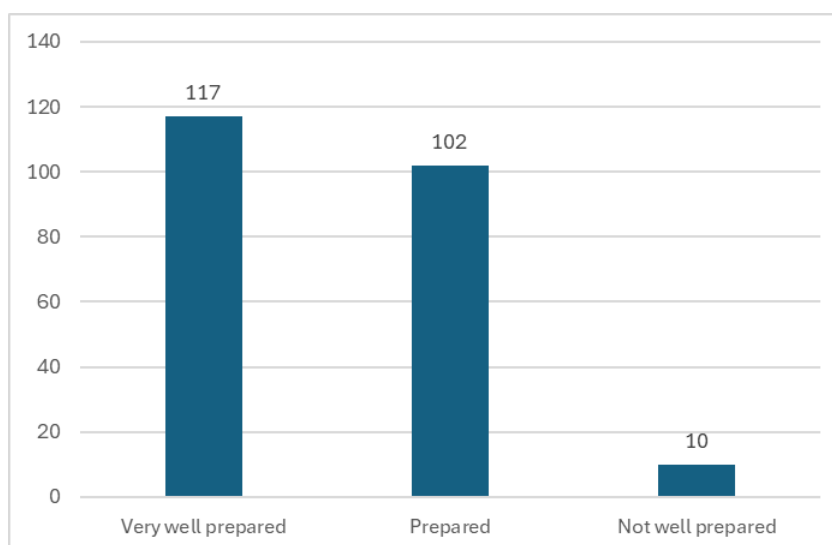
"I think volunteering could be helpful, but there is none at present and don't think there ever has been."

Q11. How well prepared / trained are volunteers when they join your department?

92% (n=229) of staff surveyed responded to this question.

- 88% (n=219) of staff said that volunteers were very well prepared or prepared when they join the department.
- 12% (n=10) said that volunteers were not well prepared.

Figure 9 - How well prepared / trained volunteers are when they join the department



Staff were invited to explain why they responded to Q10 in the way they did - 165 comments were received. A selection of quotes from staff:

"All the volunteers that I have met have been confident within their role and clear with what they can and cannot do. They are good at feeding back to staff if any issues or concerns."

"Corporate training already completed on arrival to department. Team then able to facilitate more specific training relevant to the volunteers specific role."

"From my experience of the service they seem prepared and not over confident."

"I engage with volunteers through the Volunteer Service so volunteers already have training and are already a good fit to the organisation."

"I liaise with the volunteer manager after their training on how we shadow our volunteers on how ever many visits it take for them to feel comfortable. Our volunteer manager does regular check ups and I keep in touch about progress and how comfortable they are around our patient group."

"The volunteers go through a rigorous induction both on the role the play, and also in the area they will be volunteering. They are also given guidance to complete the online module in TURAS."

"The volunteers visit first then join our experienced volunteer for several training shifts prior to going 'solo'. All members of the Nursing team are available for advice and direction if it is required."

"They bring life experience and attend mandatory induction sessions / other appropriate sessions to enable them to be aware of the area they are to be working in."

"This has definitely come a long way and volunteers are now more prepared than they ever were in the past, but there is always learning, reflection and improvement, and that's a positive cycle."

"Volunteers are prepared but we could do better in terms of training we offer as part of their CPD and growing awareness of spiritual care. We are currently working on this."

Some staff shared their reflections on how improvements could be made to helping volunteers feel better prepared:

"At times confidence building is needed."

"Since starting at [location] 2 years ago I have not had great success with volunteers. I think this is because they need a good basic support when they come to the ward and this is difficult with staffing and time constraints."

"Some are shy but that's to be expected as they tend to be young and never experienced environment or stations that can arise."

"There are some ongoing quality issues we need to sort out through follow up training."

"Volunteers need guidance on what to expect from patients. Can sometimes be emotional."

"Could possibly have more training on violence and aggression and dementia."

"Could have training on hand hygiene, PPE, linen disposal."

A small number of staff were unsure what training is provided:

"I'm not sure what the training is but the volunteers I have encountered seem to know what they are doing."

"I am unaware what training is given pre placement."

Conclusions

The findings from the pilot survey can conclude that volunteers contribute to a range of benefits to patients, and have a particularly positive impact on NHS staff.

Most significantly, 99% of staff who responded to the survey said that involving volunteers is worth the investment of their time, and 84% also said that they spend less than 30 minutes per day providing support to volunteers which suggests that involving volunteers provides a high level of benefit for minimal investment of time.

Similarly, 69% of staff reported that involving volunteers reduces their levels of stress, alongside 26% who told us that volunteers help to support their mental health and wellbeing at work provides some evidence that the involvement of volunteers can have a direct impact on the wellbeing of staff.

Staff also reported better quality patient care, improved patient wellbeing and improved communication between staff and patients as outlined below:

65% agreed that volunteers help staff deliver better quality of care.

56% agreed that volunteers free them up to do other tasks.

45% reported that volunteers improved responsiveness to patient and visitor needs.

35% said that volunteers improve communication between staff and patients.

29% told us volunteers support their professional development and / or gave them supervisory experience.

23% told us that volunteers contribute to reduced number of complaints from patients.

Recommendations

Five recommendations have been identified:

- Share the findings of this report with the NHS Scotland Volunteering Advisory Board, Executive and Strategic Leads for Volunteering in all NHS boards and members of the Volunteering Practitioners network.
- NHS boards who participated in the pilot survey should share the findings with their volunteers.
- Use the findings of this report, combined with the findings from the 2024 NHS Scotland Volunteer Experience Survey to communicate the impact of NHS Scotland Volunteering more widely across NHS Scotland, Scottish Government, Health & Social Care and Third Sector.
- Gather feedback on the report and identify improvements which could be made to the survey structure and questions.
- The NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme should embed this survey as part of their Volunteering Impact Series on an annual basis, working to encourage as many NHS boards to participate and share their local data with the programme team for analysis and reporting.

Appendix 1

This briefing paper was provided by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme Team to NHS boards participating in the survey.

NHS Scotland Volunteering

Gathering experiences and feedback from NHS staff who work alongside volunteers.

As part of our ongoing programme of work to demonstrate the impact that volunteering has on NHS Scotland, its staff, patients and of course the volunteers themselves we would like to invite you to participate in a pilot of a national survey which will focus on gathering the experiences and feedback of NHS staff who work alongside volunteers in wards and departments across Scotland.

A working group with representatives from NHS Tayside, NHS Lothian, NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Ayrshire & Arran and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have developed a set of questions and have tested them locally with a small number of staff.

The pilot will run from **15th April 2024 – 17th May 2024**, during which time participating NHS boards will run their own survey. Data can be gathered electronically or via paper copies of the survey (which will need to be entered into the MS Form template for analysis).

It will be important for participating NHS boards to take an active approach to encouraging as many staff as possible to participate in order to gather enough data to be able to robustly report on the difference that volunteering makes to staff. Consideration should be given in advance of the survey opening as to the minimum number of responses that you hope to achieve, for example:

- In a large acute hospital setting with volunteering activity taking place in multiple wards and departments, aiming for at least 1 response from each ward / department as a minimum.
- In a smaller site or service aiming to gather feedback from 3 or 4 staff in each ward or department as a minimum, or at least 1 response from each staffing group e.g. (Senior Charge Nurse/ Charge Nurse /Clinical Support Worker /Allied Health Professional /support services).

If you are not sure about the number of responses that you should aim for, please get in touch and we can help to identify a minimum target based on your individual circumstances.

We hope to gather feedback from a wide range of staff who support or work alongside volunteers in wards and departments such as:

- Senior charge nurses
- Charge nurses
- Clinical support workers
- Allied Health Professionals
- Porter staff
- Housekeeping staff
- Clinical nurse managers
- Site management staff

- Catering staff

After the survey window closes and data has been gathered, participating NHS boards can use this data to report on the experiences and feedback of staff in their area. We would also request that participating NHS boards share the raw data with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, who will analyse the entire data set and publish a national report, similar to the [Experiences of NHS Scotland Volunteers](#) report.

June 2024

You can read and download this document from our website.
We are happy to consider requests for other languages or formats.
Please contact our Equality and Diversity Advisor on 0141 225 6999
or email his.contactpublicinvolvement@nhs.scot

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Edinburgh Office	Glasgow Office
Gyle Square	Delta House
1 South Gyle Crescent	50 West Nile Street
Edinburgh	Glasgow
EH12 9EB	G1 2NP
0131 623 4300	0141 225 6999
www.healthcareimprovementscotland.scot	