

Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements as a Talent Retention Strategy

Industry Best Practices:
Alexandra Hospital

Produced by:



Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

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IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AS A TALENT RETENTION STRATEGY

Alexandra Hospital (AH) has been part of the National University Health System (NUHS) since June 2018, and will be a 326-bedder facility, providing seamless, one-stop comprehensive care by one care team to some 100,000 residents in the Queenstown precinct (the oldest housing estate) and Southwest and the rest of Singapore. Alexandra Hospital is the first Integrated General Hospital in Singapore providing holistic and seamless care from acute care to rehabilitative settings, under one roof.

Beyond in-patient care, the organisation's Community Care Coordination Unit (C3U) works with community partners to assist patients and their families to ensure they have the necessary medical and social support to stay healthy at home and in the community.

FORMALISING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS (FWAS)

Facing the dual pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic and a competitive labour market, the hospital has invested in FWAs, at both the Group and organisational levels to differentiate itself as an Employer of Choice.

With the increased utilisation of FWAs during the pandemic, in compliance with safe distancing measures, the NUHS Group HR team took the opportunity to unify FWA policies across the various institutions and for a workforce of more than 14,500 under its purview.

The process kicked off with a multi-functional team comprising representatives from HR, IT and Corporate Communications conducting a survey with employees as well as with supervisors to gather feedback on their experience and concerns, if any, on implementing remote work. These perspectives

were used to inform the development of the Group level FWA policy, which was launched in October 2020.

The FWA policy is comprehensive, covering the types of FWAs available, the process of request and approval as well as general guiding principles, i.e., that requests would be assessed on a case-by-case basis and approval would be decided by the respective Department Heads based on the individual needs and operational feasibility.

Notably, the policy also provides protocols and comprehensive guidelines for remote working employees, as successful FWA implementation is recognised as a shared responsibility between the employer and employees. This is made available on the organisation's intranet for easy access for all staff.

FWA GUIDELINES FOR ALEXANDRA HEALTH EMPLOYEES



- Adherence to Company Policies and SOPs



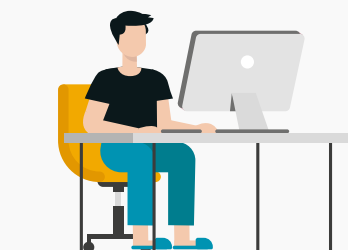
- Designated Work Times



- Managing Confidentiality and Security of Information



- Expectations when attending remote meetings
 - Attending essential meetings
 - Meeting etiquette/behaviours



- How to allocate and manage a designated workspace at home
 - Safety management at the workspace
 - How to manage Internet connections from home



- Guidelines for Work from Home
 - List of traits of a Successful Home-Based Employee; how to set goals and objectives
 - Tips for setting up a conducive workspace at home
 - Ideas on managing relationships and communication with colleagues while working remotely
 - Clarity of accountability of work assigned

TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

With the formalisation of FWAs, the menu of flex options was also expanded for the workforce. Previously, part-time work as well as flexible shift schedules were utilised to support its Acute Care and Community Care services. More recently, staggered working hours, telecommuting and compressed work week arrangements have been

made available and are gaining some interest as well. This may be attributable to the clearly structured and articulated FWA policy providing employees with the confidence to utilise the various flex options as they understand the guidelines and expectations.

FWAS AVAILABLE AT ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL*



Work from Home (Telecommuting)

- A work arrangement where employees are able to work a set number of days per week, from home.
- Mainly utilised by corporate back-end roles.

Frontline employees may utilise this FWA for non-frontline tasks (e.g., virtual training, meetings).

Part-time Work

- A work arrangement where the employee works a set number of hours, which is less than 35 hours a week.
- Frequently utilised by both frontline and back-end corporate roles.

This FWA is popular mainly with female employees with caregiving responsibilities.

Staggered Work Hours

- A work arrangement where the employee can vary their start and end times within a specific time band, while adhering to the stipulated number of work hours.

- Frequently utilised and found to be most suited for corporate back-end roles.

(Those on shift patterns are not considered on staggered hours.)

Compressed Work Week

- Lesser utilised FWA, compared to the other available options. Some employees in nursing and pharmacy roles have utilised this.

*These FWAs are also available across all NUHS Group organisations.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE FWA IMPLEMENTATION

For Alexandra Hospital, the implementation of FWAs has met with a favourable response, with employees finding the flex options relevant and useful in managing career and personal responsibilities. A few key organisational characteristics have been identified as being the success factors in the development and implementation of FWAs.

1 Anticipating the Evolving Needs of the Workforce

At AH, the management is committed to identifying employee needs, and also stays ahead of the curve by considering how work trends and changes in the workforce may impact employees in the longer term.

For example, while Nursing roles are currently predominantly held by females, there is a relatively small but growing group of males who opt for this career as well. Males in the workforce have also indicated that work-life harmony and family priorities are of importance to them. Thus, there is a conscious intent to make FWAs consistently available to all employees, rather than approving informal adhoc arrangements.

The management also carefully considers the implications of FWA implementation and

ensures that employees are well-equipped to adapt to the new ways of working. For example, when redesigning job roles, the required work competencies are reviewed. Where necessary, employees are provided with upgrading of skills to carry out higher-level tasks and cross-functional roles to support operational demands.

Regular conversations with employees are organised to better understand their work-life needs and deploy FWAs effectively to support them, as part of a wider talent retention strategy. The hospital has also planned for focus group discussions with nurses to identify new flex solutions for a pilot programme.

2 Creating a Mindset Shift and Being Open to New Flex Solutions

In a highly competitive labour market, AH has been agile and considered other forms of flexibility to support manpower needs. This includes leveraging freelance or locum nurses through agencies; these are qualified and experienced nursing staff who value flexibility and avail their services to AH for short term assignments. The Management takes steps to

mitigate the challenges of deploying this group which includes organising various shift patterns, managing the handover of tasks across shifts, as well integrating locum nurses into the AH culture for a seamless patient experience. With this, the organisation is able to meet around 5% of its staffing requirements through locum nurses.

3 Support and Direction from the Leadership

At AH, the senior leadership sets the tone for the organisational culture of openness and adaptability. Having an open mindset has enabled AH senior leaders and supervisors to continually enhance ways of working and embrace FWAs. Challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, have been viewed by the leadership as an opportunity to trial a new way of work by tapping on locum nurses to supplement the permanent workforce.

Positive behaviours from senior leaders have helped to create a 'flex-friendly' work environment. This includes,

- Engaging employees directly and listening to feedback from the ground at different stages of the FWA implementation process to quickly assess and refine practices to ensure the sustainability of the overall FWA plans. As a further step, they also invest time in structured career conversations with employees to understand work-life needs at different life-stages and identify appropriate FWA solutions for these.
- Effectively communicating the rationale, benefits and expectations down the line, so that all employees understand the objectives and intentions of the FWA plans as well as their individual roles to make it a success.
- Role-modelling digital fluency in the way they communicate, share information, train and coach others and execute tasks, to exemplify how technology can be used for work effectiveness, including service delivery.
- Changing of mindsets to support FWA utilisation, i.e. gauging employee effectiveness and commitment on objective measures such as KPIs, rather than hours spent in the office setting.



REAPING THE BENEFITS OF FWA IMPLEMENTATION

With the introduction of FWAs, AH has been able to expand its service offerings, to include virtual care services for patients via teleconsulting. With telecommuting arrangements now available to employees, healthcare professionals including doctors can still provide patient care, while working remotely. Staff productivity has also improved as nurses are able to monitor more patients daily through virtual consulting. This service has received positive feedback, and there are plans to continue monitoring patient feedback to maintain service standards even while empowering employees to utilise FWAs.

The hospital has also been able to efficiently meet growing manpower needs by engaging locum nurses to support the permanent workforce. This ensures the organisation is better able to meet care demands and surges without disrupting planned

absences from work such as annual leave, training leave, attachments etc. This has also resulted in better employee engagement levels, as staff feel supported with the additional manpower to manage workload issues.

Looking to the future, Alexandra Hospital intends to build on its current FWA success and further explore how job roles can be redesigned and shared for greater work efficiencies in the long run. The organisation intends to further cultivate and leverage the pool of freelance and temporary nursing staff for greater stability in manpower planning, and also broaden the skillset of nurses to facilitate cross-deployment when needed. In a competitive healthcare sector, AH is a positive example of how flexibility can be used to meet both organisational goals and employee needs.



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About Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

TAFEP is one of three agencies under TAL, along with the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council.

TAFEP helps employers build workplaces where employees are respected, valued and able to achieve their fullest potential, for the success of the organisation. Employers can approach TAFEP for tools, resource materials and assistance to implement fair and progressive practices at their workplaces. Employees or individuals who encounter workplace discrimination or harassment can seek assistance and advice from TAFEP.