



The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust hired refugee nurses that patients love by focusing on skills over experience



As a specialist cancer hospital operating in the multicultural city of London, The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust has always been open to hiring skilled nursing talent from outside of the UK. After learning about a refugee program organized by NHS England and the nonprofit Talent Beyond Boundaries, leaders at The Royal Marsden were eager to get involved.

In March 2022, the hospital welcomed its first six Palestinian nurses, with an additional four arriving the following summer. After working in support roles while they gained their Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) registration to practice in the UK, these nurses have gone on to become integral parts of The Royal Marsden's medical team — bringing not only technical expertise, but a wealth of cultural knowledge, empathy, and determination that has enriched the workplace.



“ You’re going to have staff who will stay. You’re not going to have a retention problem because they feel part of it — they’re being valued for their skills.

Peta Hicks, Practice Educator, The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust

About The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust

INDUSTRY:
Healthcare

No. OF EMPLOYEES:
5,000

LOCATION:
London, UK

As of March 2024, the vacancy rate of registered nursing roles in England was **7.5%**.

Source: [NHS Vacancy Statistics England](#), April 2015 - March 2024

Making the switch to a skills-based approach

To ensure nurses from refugee backgrounds were set up for success, The Royal Marsden focused on both the skills they had and the ones they needed to develop:

Looking beyond experience

When The Royal Marsden hired its first cohort of Palestinian nurses, the team was unsure where to place them. The nurses were highly trained, but few had experience working with cancer patients. As such, The Royal Marsden got creative — looking at the whole person, rather than just past experience, to understand where each nurse could best apply their skills.

Adapting the interview process

While some of the nurses struggled with English during their initial interviews, their language skills evolved rapidly after being placed in an environment where they were interacting with patients and other staff on a regular basis. The Royal Marsden learned to simplify its interview questions for the second cohort, helping to put the nurses at ease.

Supporting professional development

After placing its first cohort of nurses in various wards, The Royal Marsden monitored their professional development to ensure they were thriving. When the team realized that nurses in one ward were using their skills to communicate mostly with Arabic-speaking patients, which made it harder for them to practice their English, The Royal Marsden stepped in to speak to the matron and make an adjustment. The nurses went on to pass their exams and grow their careers at the hospital, making the whole team proud.

The results

By focusing on skills when hiring refugees, The Royal Marsden has been able to build a compassionate, globally minded team:

Essential skills: Soft skills like empathy are critical in the nursing profession. Nurses from refugee backgrounds exemplify soft skills like compassion, empathy, and commitment to patient care.

Better patient experience: Having Palestinian nurses on the team has helped the entire nursing staff better understand the needs of patients from a diverse range of cultures and communities, empowering them to provide better care.

Inclusive work culture: When the first cohort of Palestinian nurses joined The Royal Marsden, staff wanted to be respectful of different cultures. This challenged them to think more inclusively about team events, allowing a more thoughtful culture to flourish.

Embrace the benefits of skills-based hiring today

Watch our free [LinkedIn Learning path](#) for tips and best practices to help you get started.

