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How cost savings can drive concurrent workforce modernization, career development and improved patient care

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Workforce modernization has associated negative connotations of decreased morale, static career development and staff marginalization. Through our Clinical Assistant (CA) project at a busy Major-Trauma Centre we delivered a significant financial savings whilst achieving improved patient care, improved doctor morale and enhanced training opportunities. Development of career trajectories for entry-level healthcare roles and most importantly a future proofed workforce for the challenging years ahead for the NHS. During a 6-month pilot we seconded 5 Healthcare Assistants to a new role of CA to provide administrative, clerical and clinical support to Foundation Year doctors within a busy tertiary General Surgery department. During this period we demonstrated a reduction in the working hours of the Foundation Trainees, which resulted in significant reductions in the financial burden of additional-hours payments, when offset against the additional salary costs of the 5CAs, still represented a cost saving of £35000. CAs developed their clinical repertoire and experience by working closely with doctors and allied health professionals. Our first cohort of CAs used these experiences as a springboard in their career progression, with 2 going onto higher nursing degrees and a further CA joining the prestigious first cohort of Physicians' Associates at our affiliated Medical School. The loss of these talented CAs to higher training is not seen as an impediment to the project, but rather a unique selling point in a system where stagnation and career "flat-lining" remains a real possibility. Using this we have been able to recruit further cohorts of highly skilled and motivated individuals into the role. This continued through-put of skilled individuals into the role, combined with career development of existing CAs and the redistribution of "traditional doctor" roles to other health professionals has helped us future proof our General Surgery workforce for the foreseeable future, all within a cost-saving envelope.