

NHS FINANCE CAREER STORIES



SIMON TRUELOVE
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
AVON AND WILTSHIRE MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP NHS TRUST



CAREER BACKGROUND

Simon has been working in the NHS for 33 years. He started his career by partaking in a summer placement whilst at Bristol Polytechnic, at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. After this, he was offered a permanent job and became a Trust trainee and the organisation supported his professional training. He became a qualified accountant in 1995, and by then secured a directorate accountant job at Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust. He then obtained the Deputy Director of Finance role at the organisation and worked in this role for three years. He first became a Director of Finance in 2002 and is currently Director of Finance at Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust.

A TYPICAL DAY IN SIMON'S ROLE

As you can imagine, there is no 'typical day' for a Director of Finance. In Simon's case, the focal point of his role centres around a variety of tasks that try to enhance service delivery whilst maximising the use of scarce resources. Simon is also responsible for overseeing estates, digital procurement and contracting at the Trust and this puts him in a unique position to drive transformative change and secure resources that help to further the Trust's objectives, and this is where he gets the greatest fulfilment in his role.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout his career, Simon has been fortunate to have had several colleagues who mentored and believed in him, thereby contributing significantly to his own achievements. Simon is committed to doing the same for colleagues in his finance department and in the region and gets fulfilment through the professional and personal growth of more junior colleagues.

In terms of Simon's development opportunities, he proactively sought out ways to grow and volunteer for opportunities. He took on opportunities that he did not necessarily feel fully qualified to do but chose to immerse himself in the deep end. *'This approach played a pivotal role in building my confidence. I think throwing myself into things when I didn't feel ready is what made me a better finance director.'* His advice to junior colleagues echoes this. He encourages emerging professionals to not shy away from stepping forward and to not let the opportunities pass you by because you don't feel ready.

BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT

Simon believes his biggest work-related achievement is the success and transformation of the finance department at Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. *'I am profoundly proud of the department's achievements and the dedicated finance staff who have contributed to its success. The department and its staff are so committed and do such a fantastic job.'*

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DO PEOPLE NEED FOR A CAREER IN NHS FINANCE?

Simon believes for a successful career in NHS finance, you need three characteristics – *'honesty, integrity and conviction.'* Additionally, colleagues in finance are required to work with many departments across the NHS, and therefore, colleagues in NHS finance need the ability to communicate complex financial issues in a simple way that is easy to digest.

BIGGEST REWARDS OF WORKING IN NHS FINANCE

The biggest reward in working in NHS finance for Simon is knowing that the decisions and contributions you make will make a difference to the delivery of patient care. Simon, who looks after digital and estates, reviews and approves business cases that seek to improve and innovate the conditions that their staff work in. This ultimately results in a better service for all service users and patients. *'I believe that happy staff = stronger recruitment and retention, and this results in better quality and more sustainable services that we can provide to patients.'* Simon also finds it rewarding to strive for value from the investments made and evidence this. Especially now, delivering value in a time of constrained resources is rewarding and also imperative.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As Simon has gone through his career, he has realised what works for him, in terms of a work-life balance. He believes that quality is more important than quantity. The importance of regular breaks from work cannot be understated and it is imperative to ensure you are resting enough. You have a fresher mind and a stronger ability to work when you are rested. You should work in a way that feels right to you as an individual; don't be chained to your desk and don't think that you need to prove how hard you work to others.

As a finance director, it is imperative to have a strong deputy and team, this will allow the smooth running of the day-to-day finance department. A strong team helps to support and enable each other. Cycling, exercise and spending time with family plays an important role in his down-time to switch off from the day job.

Favourite book: anything to do with cycling!

Favourite band: U2.