

CLAIRE HOWELLS

SIZE 5

Audio Producer: Caitlin Hobbs

So we are in the shared services car park which is in Nantgarw, and we are looking around at all of the mountains that are looking over to Caerphilly. We've got a lot of buildings here, we've got Velindre Health Board over that side, the headquarters, and then next to us we've got the Public Health Wales buildings as well, and also we've got a lot of takeaways across the road, because we've got Nando's and Frankie & Benny's, which isn't great.

So my name is Claire Howells, and I'm currently the Senior Medical Workforce Manager for NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership. I'm probably one of few people who actually ended up in a career linked to their degree, and I did business studies with HR, human resources, in UWIC, Cardiff. I think it was just I'd always had an interest in HR. In the second year we had to choose a subspecialty, so it could be marketing, and I knew that wasn't for me, because I wasn't very creative and that type of thing. There was IT, which was a no for me, but then there was HR and then, when I looked at the different modules, it just, it just fitted, and I knew that, that is what I wanted to do.

2003 I went back part time to University of Glamorgan in Pontypridd. And I did, it was a three year course and it was my post-grad certificate my postgrad diploma and my master's in HR, and then I got that in July 2005. I remember that year very clearly, because, in February, my husband and father-in-law were fitting our kitchen, because we'd recently moved into our house. I was doing my ten, no twenty thousand words dissertation. And we were also getting married in September. So I was also trying to arrange a wedding as well, so that was quite a stressful year. I stuck with it, and that's the type of person I am - if I do something I have to see it through, because if I start something at four o'clock I won't go home until it's done, and it drives my husband nuts, and unfortunately that might mean sometimes I can't go home till about seven o'clock, but if it's done, I don't have to come into it the next day, I can get on with whatever's next on my list of many things to do.

I work in the human resources department specifically managing GP trainees, and we're made up of a team of two, so there's myself as the manager and I have a Medical Workforce Officer and we manage approximately 398 GP trainees across Wales. What happened previously, is doctors were employed by health boards and then, when they were in GP practice their contract would have to be ended in the health board, they would then have to be re-enrolled in a GP practice, and then, when they returned to the health board re-enrolled again and their contract ended in practice. So there was no continuity. It was very destructive for the, the doctors. So now they are employed with us for the duration, and they also have one consistent HR service that they can come to, with Emma and myself. I feel like I'm helping to make a big change towards the agenda in Wales. Because GP recruitment is a problem, and it's a problem across the whole of the UK. There could be a number of reasons, it could be that they want to go into a hospital based post so they could be wanting to go in something like medicine. A lot of the doctors, before they take up any of their core training posts, will go on to experience overseas. There's a lot, I know there's a lot of research that is going on at the moment, in terms of general practice and why people want to go in there. I know this.

We've got difficulties in sort of the rural areas, when the trainees come in, their sort of favoured places are your larger hospitals, so Cardiff being in the capital, they're very popular ones, but then

the ones that are down sort of Aberystwyth way, Pembrokeshire way, they're harder to fill up and I think there's a lot of changes to GP practices in terms of the hours that they're expected to work - the weekend working, and they already work long hours as it is, so I think that is one of the reasons as well, that there's problems. The issue with the contracts, this taking place in England at the moment, isn't happening in Wales, because Welsh Government have taken the stance that their contracts will not change. Touch wood we haven't got the contracts issue to, to deal with at the moment.

We have something that we've got downstairs called the GOB file, which is a 'glimpse of brilliance' file. So anytime we get positive comments, we'll put those in the file, to just show that people are happy with the service that we're providing. We will support people if they are going through issues in terms of sickness. About three months ago I had two doctors on one of the schemes; one was having quite significant problems, and we had somebody who had lost her mother in the hospital that she was on rotation in, and she had to go to the morgue and the resusc room, that was bringing painful memories back for her. So I worked with the programme directors. And together we put her into a different post. So she didn't have those problems and those stresses and she didn't have to go off sick.

Even though, it's hard work, because it's just the two of us. But then, on the flipside, it is quite a personal service, because they know they only need to speak to Emma and I. We're either a voice at the end of the phone or we are a face that they could, they can speak to. This picture was the trial run for the Three Peaks Challenge. So there was a number of us on top of Pen y Fan. Which we did back in early February. There was thirty eight of us from shared services that did the Welsh Three Peaks Challenge on the 30th of April and it was in aid of Velindre Cancer Centre. When I signed on last year, I did think, 'Oh, 30th of April, weather will be nice. So it would be quite a nice walk.' Obviously, we'd had snow that particular week before, so walking up Snowdon at half past six in the morning and getting up pretty much half-way, and the snow was getting thicker and thicker and thicker. By the time I got to the summit the snow was above my ankles. It was really deep. We then did Cadair Idris at half past two and then, by the time we'd done that, and been driven down to Pen y Fan, we did Pen y Fan at half past eleven at night. And I go home at quarter to three in the morning and it was a good bonding exercise, because we got each other up there. You know, teamwork is such a critical thing for us in the workforce. Teamwork was essential, such a huge achievement, and I was getting quite emotional. I think I was still emotional on the Sunday, because people were saying to me, 'Look, Claire, we're so proud of you,' and I could feel myself going again, my mother-in-law gave me a bunch of flowers and I sort of burst into tears!

I do wear my heart on my sleeve. I weep at everything. I suppose with the job that I'm in, the nature of it can be quite challenging, but I haven't really had much that's been challenging in this particular role, but in my previous role as the sort of the HR lead, I used to do everything in that particular area for disciplinaries, for grievances - some cases have been, you know, very challenging. And I just think the way I've, I've got over it, is I've got a job to do. It's not acting judgmental, it's acting very neutral but also very supportive. We are looking after a lot of trainees, making sure that we give them the best HR employer relations service that they can have, if they need any sort of additional support to manage in their in their job. There's a lot of work to do with just two of us. But again it's providing the personal service. I'd like to think that if we offer that service, then they'll then tell their friends who haven't really decided, 'You know, the service that you get from the GPs is really good,' and then it helps then the overall recruitment of GPs in Wales, which helps then the communities, the different communities across Wales.

I'm quite an open person, so if people want to, just feel if I open up to them, that they feel comfortable, and they can discuss, you know, with me what they, what they want to, you know. One of the doctors asked about maternity and I happened to be saying, as well, about my husband and I going through the adoption process at the moment, and she was saying, 'Oh, I'm getting to this age, you know, I don't want to wait,' and I said, 'Look,' I said, 'I'm in exactly the same position and I'm thirty eight and that's what we're looking at now.' So, she's now, because I've told her that,

she's emailing and asking, 'How's it going?' I just feel, if we, if we give that personal service, they feel that they can talk to us, they can trust us, and, you know, they know that we will do a good job for them. I do get job satisfaction from it, because I do feel that we're making a difference. Yes, I could be the fairy godmother and Emma could be... Tinkerbell!