

'It brings you in and shelters you': NHS creates 'recovery gardens' for staff and patients

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What role do you think outdoor spaces can play in mental and physical wellbeing?
- Can you think of any personal experiences or examples where spending time in nature helped reduce stress or improve your mood?
- In many cities, green spaces are decreasing due to urban development. Should governments prioritise creating more public gardens and green areas in urban spaces? What challenges do you think they might face?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the wordpool in the article. Read the definitions and match them to a word from the wordpool.

backlogs

herbaceous

rehabilitation

untapped potential

blueprint

morale

shrubs

wellbeing

clear one's head

pollen

stimulate

decompress

refuge

unquestionably

- _____ : the process of helping someone recover and regain strength after an illness, injury or surgery
- _____ : the level of confidence and motivation of a person or group, especially in a work setting
- _____ : a fine powder produced by flowers that is carried by wind or insects and which helps plants reproduce
- _____ : abilities or opportunities that have not yet been used or developed
- _____ : to encourage or increase activity, interest or energy in something
- _____ : a detailed plan or design that shows how something should be built or developed
- _____ : a safe or peaceful place where someone can escape from stress or danger

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8. _____ : to take a break and stop thinking about worries or stress in order to feel refreshed
9. _____ : describes plants with soft, green stems that usually die back in winter and grow again in spring
10. _____ : without any doubt; definitely
11. _____ : small to medium-sized woody plants that are often used in gardens for decoration
12. _____ : to relax and relieve stress, especially after a busy or difficult period
13. _____ : a build-up of work or tasks that have not yet been completed, often due to delays
14. _____ : the state of being comfortable, healthy and happy

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Without a clear _____, large construction projects can easily run into delays and cost overruns.
2. Recovering from a serious injury requires months of _____ to regain full mobility.
3. Boosting _____ in the workplace often involves recognition, rewards and a positive team environment.
4. A well-designed ad campaign should _____ curiosity and create a lasting impression on the audience.
5. After dealing with back-to-back meetings, taking a moment to _____ can improve focus and productivity.
6. Many industries fail to recognise the _____ in sustainable energy solutions.
7. Due to staffing shortages, the hospital struggled to manage the growing _____ of patients waiting for treatment.

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8. Stepping away from a difficult task for a short walk can help _____ and improve problem-solving abilities.
9. With no phone signal and only the sound of birds, the cabin in the woods became a perfect _____ from daily life.
10. Maintaining good mental and physical _____ requires a balance of exercise, rest and proper nutrition.
11. The Chelsea Flower Show always features a wide variety of _____ plants such as peonies and dahlias.
12. Bees play a vital role in agriculture by transferring _____ from flower to flower.
13. Unlike trees, _____ tend to have multiple stems and remain small in height.
14. Technological advancements have _____ transformed the way people work and communicate.

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Trusts work with the Royal Horticultural Society to create outdoor refuges for staff and patients

Donna Ferguson

16 March, 2025

- 1 For Hayleigh Austin-Richards, it is a place to have a cry, breathe fresh air and remind herself there is something magical about butterflies. As often as she can, the ward manager of Chapel Allerton's stroke rehabilitation unit in Leeds visits the hospital's "Garden for Recovery", originally created for the Chelsea Flower Show and installed last summer.
- 2 Austin-Richards's job can be hectic and tough, and she sees people going through some of the worst moments of their lives. The garden is a refuge: "It's quiet. The way it's designed, it brings you in and shelters you in it. You feel like you're in the middle of nowhere," she said.
- 3 "Having a few minutes or half an hour out there, in nature, sometimes in the sunshine – it helps. You decompress and go back to work with renewed energy and a fresh set of eyes, feeling more cheerful and more focused."
- 4 With stress among NHS staff at record levels, and as the awareness of the psychological benefits of being in nature increases, growing numbers of NHS hospital trusts are noticing the untapped potential of their outdoor spaces – and turning to gardeners for help. In the past 10 months alone, 16 NHS hospitals, GPs and other healthcare settings have contacted the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to ask for help creating "wellbeing gardens" for staff, patients and visitors.
- 5 These gardens are designed to stimulate the senses and provide "hopeful" places to rest and process emotions, according to RHS wellbeing garden programme manager Victoria Shearing.
- 6 Instead of viewing their outdoor spaces as areas to pass through or look out on, "hospitals are starting to see these spaces as offering real health and wellbeing benefits for their staff and visitors," she said. "They've seen them work for patients in clinical settings like Horatio's Garden [at the National Spinal Injuries Centre] and Maggie's [specialist cancer centres]."
- 7 Dame Linda Pollard, chair of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, said indoor spaces where staff can find peace and quiet on a busy, urban hospital site are often very limited: "Staff rooms are over-populated and they're not an environment that helps you de-stress and clear your head." Pollard has invited the RHS to open a wellbeing garden at St James's University hospital, Leeds, in September.
- 8 The garden is part of a national network of wellbeing gardens that the RHS is creating across England for NHS staff and patients as it works to design a blueprint for wellbeing gardens due to be completed this year.
- 9 Pollard thinks there are "unquestionably" benefits to be had from installing wellbeing gardens. "We've got a real mental health issue nationally," she said. "The NHS is a stressful environment to be in, regardless of what job you do. It's an awful lot of pressure and it got worse over Covid."
- 10 Staff shortages and long waiting-list backlogs are only adding to this pressure. "We have to look after our staff. The NHS is made up not only of the people we serve but the people who work within it, and if we forget that, we won't have an NHS."
- 11 The first garden in the RHS scheme opened in 2022 at University hospital Lewisham, where 70 per cent of staff surveyed by the RHS have since reported that the garden improved their wellbeing and 81 per cent noted a positive impact on workplace morale. Another garden opened last summer at Colchester hospital and one is planned in Greater Manchester.
- 12 All three gardens so far have been designed by the BBC Gardeners' World presenter Adam Frost. "In a hospital environment, you can experience every human emotion possible – whether that's anger, tears or a moment of joy," said Frost. "Gardens give us space. If you watch a bird land on a tree or a bee collect pollen, that's a moment where you're not then thinking about something else."
- 13 As well as offering sheltered places to sit and wheelchair-accessible paths, all of the wellbeing gardens Frost has designed have layers of planting, from trees and shrubs to herbaceous plants and bulbs: "There's huge diversity in there that will carry people through the season."

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- 14 "Ultimately, gardens are about moments – and moments are created by something new appearing on a certain day and the wildlife that comes into the garden," Frost said.
- 15 When Austin-Richards manages to take a break in the garden, she feels the benefits for hours. "I definitely feel better at the end of the day, when I'm coming home. It is also used every single day by our patients for therapy sessions."
- 16 Some of her patients have been stuck in a clinical environment for months. "For them to feel, even for a few minutes, that they're not in a hospital – it makes a massive difference to them."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False.

1. The 'Garden for Recovery' at Chapel Allerton's stroke rehabilitation unit was originally designed for patients only and not for staff use. **True / False**
2. Dame Linda Pollard believes that indoor spaces where staff can find peace on busy hospital sites are often very limited. **True / False**
3. According to the survey at University Hospital Lewisham, staff reported less benefits to their wellbeing and to workplace morale. **True / False**
4. NHS wellbeing gardens initiative was developed in response to increasing stress levels among healthcare workers, which worsened during the COVID pandemic. **True / False**
5. The article suggests that hospital administrators initially focused on gardens as aesthetic features before later recognising their potential health benefits. **True / False**
6. According to Austin-Richards, wellbeing gardens can't be used as therapy sessions. **True / False**

b. Find the following information in the text.

1. two hospitals where wellbeing gardens have already been installed
2. a statistic that shows how the wellbeing garden at University Hospital Lewisham has benefited staff
3. a reason why traditional staff rooms in hospitals are not effective spaces for relaxation
4. four design features included in wellbeing gardens to enhance the visitor experience
5. three challenges currently affecting NHS staff that increase the need for wellbeing gardens

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4 Key language

- a. Complete the information about the passive voice with the words from the box. Then underline the verbs in the passive voice in the sentences.

action

doer

unknown

- The passive voice is used when the focus or emphasis in a sentence is on the _____, the receiver of the action, or when the _____ of the action is _____ or irrelevant.
1. The hospital's "Garden for Recovery" was originally created for the Chelsea Flower Show and was installed last summer.
 2. These gardens are designed to stimulate the senses and provide 'hopeful' places to rest and process emotions.
 3. Another garden opened last summer at Colchester hospital, and one is planned in Greater Manchester.
 4. Ultimately, gardens are about moments – and moments are created by something new appearing on a certain day and the wildlife that comes into the garden.
 5. It is also used every single day by our patients for therapy sessions.

5 Discussion

- a. Discuss these questions.

- What role do outdoor spaces and nature play in your daily life?
- Do you think that mental health initiatives, like wellbeing gardens, could improve work environments in other high-pressure industries, not just healthcare? Which ones and why or why not?
- Creating wellbeing gardens in hospitals requires space, funding and maintenance. Do you think all hospitals should invest in them or are there more urgent priorities for healthcare spending?

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6 In your own words

- a. Write a short story or journal entry from the perspective of a healthcare worker (e.g. a nurse, doctor or therapist) who uses the wellbeing garden during a busy workday. They should reflect on how spending time in the garden helps them cope with stress and helps them focus on their job. Include:
 - a description of the garden
 - personal thoughts on the emotional and psychological benefits of spending time outdoors.
- b. Share your pieces of creative writing with your class.