



Sixty seconds on . . . wingman lounges

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The BMJ

Where you put your mate once you've pulled?

No, not quite. Project Wingman¹ is a scheme providing first class style lounges in NHS hospitals, as a place for staff to take a break.

How did it launch?

The project is the brainchild of British Airways pilot Dave Fielding. Speaking at the Risky Business conference² on 2 June, Fielding said, "I was wondering what on earth I would do when I was grounded. I thought, pilots are very good at organising things so why not use them in the NHS."

Is he flying solo?

Not quite. Fielding said the idea really got wings when easyJet captain Emma Henderson and clinical psychologist Robert Bor got involved. Bor suggested that Fielding and his colleagues use their customer service skills to boost the morale of NHS staff.

Has it taken off?

Definitely. There are now 50 lounges in NHS hospitals, staffed by over 5000 volunteers made up of crew from a range of different airlines.

What's on the menu?

The idea behind the project is simple—to provide NHS staff with a smile. This might involve volunteers chatting to staff about holidays or making them a cup of tea. "Staff come into

the lounge, we make them a nice cup of tea in a nice environment and we talk—and before they know it they've had 10-15 minutes without thinking about work," Fielding said.

So, they're on cloud 9?

That might be pushing it, but Fielding said the lounges have benefited staff. Jasmine Kamani, an easyJet cabin manager and lead for a lounge in Barnett, north London, agreed, adding, "It's improved the atmosphere throughout the hospital, it's boosted morale—people are saying, 'We don't want you to leave.'"

Are volunteers in flying suits or scrubs?

The pilot and cabin crew volunteers all work in their uniforms, a conscious move, Fielding says, to have the biggest impact and make staff feel like they're being served by fellow professionals.

What do doctors think?

They're rating the service first class, it seems. Surgical trainee Fi Lewis said on Twitter,³ "We absolutely love ours!" while rheumatology and obstetric medicine trainee Iona Thorne said, "It was utterly fabulous. I picked up children's magazines to take home and told my children they were a thank you present from the hospital."

1 Project Wingman. www.projectwingman.co.uk.

2 Risky Business. Lessons from covid-19. www.riskybusiness.events/lessons-from-covid-19-zoom-conference#video.

3 Lewis F. 5 June 2020. <https://twitter.com/FiFiELewis/status/1268910785020997633>.

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