

Jail time for applicants who lie on their CVs warns pre-employment screening company Powerchex

NHS's pre-employment screening practices come under scrutiny after director jailed for CV exaggerations.

London, January, 2009. A senior director at the NHS has been jailed for exaggerating his qualifications during his job application.

In January 2007 Lee Whitehead was appointed director of planning and modernisation at Stoke-on-Trent Primary Care Trust (PCT) after falsely claiming that in addition to being a member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) he had a first class bachelors degree, a Master's degree and a doctorate, when in fact he only held a second class BSc in Psychology and was not a member of the BPS.

6 months after being appointed Mr Whitehead resigned his £78,000 a year job after suspicions were raised by a coworker and Mr Whitehead was unable to provide proof of his qualifications. Even though the post-holder was not required to hold either a Master's or a PhD, or be a member of the BPS, the court handed out a 12 week prison sentence after Mr Whitehead pleaded guilty to obtaining a pecuniary advantage by deception and making a false instrument.

The lies were not discovered by pre-employment screening checks but by a suspicious coworker and Mr Whitehead had made the same claims on applications going back to June 2003. These included the Vale of Aylesbury PCT, where he had worked from April 2005 until he started employment with Stoke PCT.

"It is very surprising that the NHS has chosen to appoint a senior official without checking their qualifications" says Alexandra Kelly, Managing Director of Powerchex, a leading pre-employment screening firm. "Mr Whitehead occupied a position of public trust in a Primary Care Trust and there is no excuse that his background wasn't thoroughly investigated at the recruitment stage".

This is not the first time that the NHS has failed to spot fraudulent applicants for senior positions. In 2003, Neil Taylor produced a bogus degree certificate to land the position as head of the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust.

"The risks that the NHS takes when they skimp on the background investigation or when they start an applicant prior to the checks being completed can have very serious repercussions" says Kelly. "It is a particularly risky approach when the qualifications are of a clinical nature. This can endanger patients' lives".

NOTES TO EDITORS:

About Powerchex

Powerchex is the UK's premier pre-employment screening firm for financial institutions. Based in the City of London, Powerchex checks the background, employment history, criminal records and professional qualifications of applicants on behalf of financial institutions. It sets the industry benchmark of 5 days for a background check.

www.powerchex.co.uk.