



Trainee Nurse Associate Apprenticeship Programme: A Staffordshire Wide Approach

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Introduction

We are a group of 7 Trainee Nursing Associates (TNA) who began our training in the September 2021 cohort of several universities, employed by North Staffordshire GP Federation. Each TNA is based at a different GP surgery and attends a different university depending on geographical location. The recruitment process began in May 2021 with interviews and subsequent offers of employment in June 2021 ready for a September 2021 start. This centralised employment model has worked collaboratively and on behalf of the PCNs across Staffordshire and utilised the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme. This unique programme has given us the opportunity to achieve career goals as an adult learner without the financial barrier and burden.

What are we enjoying most about the course?

All the new experiences in the host GP setting and the vast range of external placements which has facilitated learning in a practical clinical setting. University is enabling improvement in knowledge which is challenging at times, however with the apprenticeship route it is a great opportunity to put into practice what has been learnt immediately. This really reinforces learning and therefore confidence both academically and clinically. A GP setting enables us to gain a wide variety of skills whilst building therapeutic relationships with patients.

What is the most difficult part of the course?

Collectively we are all feeling challenged by the academic work at University. For some of us it is going back 15 - 20 years to try and reignite those essay writing skills and for others it is a totally new experience. Our mentors and colleagues are incredibly supportive and are always willing to help explain and encourage new learning to help underpin our practical skills. Online learning has proved challenging at times, however, it has taught us to develop self-discipline for study. In terms of difficulties in our practice setting many of us have come across employers and clinical staff who don't understand the Nurse Associate role regarding clinical skills and training that we require. This has proved challenging, we feel that clearer documentation needs to be available to Practice Supervisors and Assessors to identify the framework that we need to work within. For some of us it has been difficult to get competencies and university work signed off as this is all online and people don't always have access to the websites used.

What do you enjoy most about being a TNA?

The unique model that we are training under enables us to have an additional layer of support from other fellow TNA's. Not only do we have our own individual support in general practice and at our individual universities but we also have support from each other. This enables us to bounce ideas around the group and provide each other with

the support and encouragement that is sometimes needed when we feel under pressure, particularly with university work. The benefit of being in GP practice means that we gain a wide variety of exposure to different clinical situations. For example one of the TNA's has quoted "I love helping people, a lot of what I am doing at the moment is offering advice to people on how to manage their long term conditions. You see a light come on when people understand their condition and how they can help themselves". For some of us, who were previously Health Care Assistants, we are embracing the additional skills and responsibilities that we have learnt and been given. It is exciting to be working in a role that bridges the gap between Health Care Assistants and Registered Nurses, as this is a fairly new role we are enthused with the opportunity to develop and mould our role within the GP setting. We get to learn from some extremely knowledgeable practitioners who are always keen to share their experiences and encouraging us to achieve our goals.

What were your career backgrounds before joining the scheme?

We are all from a variety of different backgrounds, however we have all come from "people" focused jobs which is a key quality for anyone wanting to begin their nursing journey. Examples of where we have come from are;

- ★ Primary School Teacher with 9 years working in mental health hospitals
- ★ Ambulance Control and palliative and complex care
- ★ Account Manager in Sales and Marketing then a move to a hospital setting as a healthcare assistant for 8 months prior to starting the apprenticeship
- ★ Care assistant in nursing homes and progressing to residential, hospital and the community as a health care assistant
- ★ Healthcare assistant in a hospital setting
- ★ Health and Wellbeing Trainer and Facilitator in a performing arts boarding school

What would you say to someone considering the apprenticeship?

It is never too late to start or change your career, get stuck in and enjoy it! We are of varying different ages and life stages, each one of us is embracing the change and the challenge of balancing university and work life. If you are considering the apprenticeship route we can honestly say that it is a model that works, is challenging, has lots of new learning but you have the support and protected time to facilitate all new learning. With university fees and cost of living rising it is a fantastic opportunity to earn whilst you learn and gain a professional qualification without the personal cost of university fees. The apprenticeship route enables you to still have an income to support your household and/or family. If you are considering the apprenticeship route, talk to as many people as possible about their experiences and challenges so that you gain a good insight as to what is expected of you. This will help you to put things in place, prior to beginning your apprenticeship, to make life a bit easier on yourself in terms of planning and familiarising yourself with documentation that you will continually refer to such as the NMC Code, Apprenticeship Standards and Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours. Get yourself familiar with reflective writing as this is a huge part of nursing and can be tricky to master, once you have a structure it will flow!

How did your practice and employer support you during your apprenticeship?

Our GP Practice setting and our employer, North Staffordshire GP Federation, work collaboratively to facilitate our progress. The support we are receiving from both organisations is outstanding with the North Staffs GP Federation facilitating additional learning opportunities through the Staffordshire Training Hub and assisting with our external placements. The GP Federation is always on hand to support us with queries or additional needs and we feel that our ideas for additional support and training are listened to and appropriately acted upon. We have been issued with uniforms from the GP Federation and our Practices are flexible in assisting our learning giving us the opportunities to have protected learning time with Practice Nurses, ANP's and GP's. Both staff and patients at our Practices have been very welcoming and understanding of our need for new learning, we feel part of the team at our GP practice settings but also of the GP Federation.