

Newly qualified nurse stories

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Some newly qualified nurses have shared their stories about their experiences in their first year after qualifying. Get a sense of the different roles available below:

Sophie Eadie, children's nurse

My first job as a children's nurse: Sophie Eadie

Studied at Middlesex University and now works in paediatrics at the Royal Free Hospital

What's your experience of working as a newly qualified nurse?

I started at the end of 2016 on a rotation programme across three different clinical areas: the in-patients paediatric ward, the day surgery ambulatory unit and out patients. I've just finished the paediatric rotation and I chose to go back to the ward for my current post. You get such a wide variety of patients.

What's it like working on rotation?

I'm glad I did the rotation because I learnt so much and accumulated a wide variety of skills. I'd recommend it to anyone who's newly qualified just to learn a bit more and get your confidence up in different areas.

Has it helped you decide what area you want to specialise in?

Yes definitely. I want to be on the general ward. I'm happy there with my mix of patients.

What do you enjoy about your job?

The interaction with the patients is the part of the job that I enjoy. I just love listening to their stories and being able to provide them with care that allows them to walk off the ward once they're discharged. It's such an amazing feeling to know that you've participated in helping that child and that family to get through their journey which is often quite tough, especially when they are with us for a long period of time.

It's so rewarding to just be there for them. Even if it's caring for them in not necessarily a medical way but holistic care - caring for the families and their siblings as well. It's such a nice occupation to be in.

What do you find most difficult about your job?

It's quite challenging if you have a difficult case to work with it can be quite hard emotionally. 99% of the time the child is fine in the end. It's just that initial moment when they deteriorate quickly that is a bit scary. But it's a good experience when that does happen because the more it happens the more I know what to do in those situations.

How do you cope when there's an emotionally difficult case?

I rely on support from my co-workers. We have quite a close knit group that I work with and we are all really there for each other. We've got a group [WhatsApp] chat and if at the end of the day we've had a really bad day we're all there to listen. Sometimes we go out for dinner after a shift to wind down and chat about what we've experienced that day. Everyone's always there for each other.

And then in my spare time when I'm not at work I try and do things like exercising or things not related to work to make sure I'm not constantly reflecting on work.

What do you think about staying in London for your first nursing job?

I'd highly recommend it. I've never actually worked anywhere else. But I feel that you get such a diversity in London and you deal with so many different people and different cases. There's loads of different cultures here as well so you learn a lot about different religions. I think it's really important to experience that.

If you could go back in time and give some advice to yourself when you were a student and applying for jobs, what would you say?

Probably just relax, it will happen. I remember panicking quite a lot about, thinking, am I going to find a job, am I going to find a job where I want one? But there's always going to be vacancies for nurses, especially in London. So just relax, take your time.

I'd also say, it gets easier. It's quite hard when you first qualify. I struggled quite a lot. But it gets a lot easier and caring for people becomes second nature.

Jill Lewis, mental health nurse

My first job as a qualified nurse: Jill Lewis

Studied at Middlesex University and now works in mental health in Camden and Islington

What's your experience of working as a newly qualified nurse?

Since qualifying in September I've worked in the South Camden Crisis Team. I love it. My job involves working with people whom would probably be admitted to a psychiatric ward if we weren't working with them. Some people need to be in the hospital, but it's not always the best environment for recovery. We aim to help people to stay at home and get good support for their mental health.

Why did you decide to specialise in mental health?

I just love talking to people and helping people. My sister and my mum are both physical health nurses. I realised that I wasn't cut out for that side of things because I find it really upsetting when people pass away and that happens more commonly in that line of work.

Also, in mental health nursing you get a lot more time to talk to people. General healthcare is more task-

oriented, but in mental healthcare we can sit and have good conversations and give people hope when they are feeling at their worst. It's more about relationships and being able to build up a rapport.

Why did you decide to stay in London after you qualified?

I'd lived in London for about three years before I started my training and I really like working for Camden & Islington NHS Foundation Trust. I've become very familiar with the Trust and I know most of the teams. I think that when you're newly qualified it's good to go somewhere where you feel comfortable and know the services.

London has got so many opportunities for nurses. There's always jobs for mental health nurses in lots of different areas. If I had moved back where I'm from in the north east in terms of career progression I think it would be very difficult because there's not as many vacancies. In London there are a lot more services that we can work in. It's also very diverse, you get to work with people from completely different cultural backgrounds. I feel like I'm learning more in London than I would if I was elsewhere in the country.

What have you found challenging about your first year as a newly qualified nurse?

The people we work with in acute mental health services often suffer from complex conditions which can cause them great distress. When feeling particularly hopeless, they may act in risky and unpredictable ways, which can include feeling that suicide is the only option. That does unfortunately happen, despite working as a team to try to help our patients, and is understandably upsetting for everyone involved in their care.

Do you get support after that happens?

We've got good managers so we are well supported when that kind of thing happens. We review the person's notes to see if anything could have been done differently, which usually isn't the case. We have one-to-one clinical supervision with someone that's more senior than us. Our wellbeing is looked after.

What do you enjoy about your job?

I really like the fact that I can be autonomous and make independent decisions. In the community most of the time I do assessments on my own. So I go to see someone who's been referred to the team and then I decide, does this person need to be in hospital, or can they be worked with safely in the community by the crisis team? Or maybe they don't need the crisis team and they would benefit from a referral to another service. I like that I can take the lead. I like doing risk assessments, which I know probably sounds really odd. But I enjoy that side of my job and being able to work as an independent practitioner.

If you could go back in time and give some advice to yourself when you were a student and applying for jobs, what would you say?

I was a little bit anxious about doing assessments on my own, but I'd say that don't need to worry because we're very well supported.

And I'd say that looking after our own wellbeing is really important because sometimes I get stressed at work. It's hard to switch off when you leave work thinking about situations. I find going to the gym helpful, and having fun with my friends, going out for food and watching crappy things on the television. Those are my ways of relaxing. They might not be everyone's cup of tea but it's what I like to do.

John Murphy, A&E nurse

My first job as a qualified nurse: John Murphy

Studied at City University London and now works in the A&E department at Homerton Hospital

What's your job like?

It's a big transition from being a student to working but the guys I work with are all very supportive and helpful. If I ever have a question they'll always be willing to answer it for me.

What do you enjoy the most about your job?

Especially in A&E no day is the same. You never know what could come in the door. It could go from quiet to busy. You just have to be prepared for everything.

What do you find most challenging about it?

Now I'm not a student, the buck stops with me. You have to explain and justify why I made a specific decision. The transition from a student takes time but I think we're getting there slowly.

How's the preceptorship?

At Homerton we have a nine-month preceptorship. One of the nurses I work with a lot is my preceptor and she's good if I have any problems I go to her. But the rest of the staff, the doctors as well, are really helpful. They know that you're newly qualified, so no question is a dumb question.

Why did you decide to work in A&E?

I did my last 12-week placement there and it was one of the areas I liked. It's always changing and nothing's ever the same. It's not a routine. You get to see so many different things. It's a broad spectrum of conditions that you deal with which is good for me because I get to see a lot to broaden my knowledge and understanding.

What do you think about staying in London after you qualify?

There are probably more opportunities in London but then again you need to consider about the cost. It has good and bad sides. There's so many hospitals recruiting. There's so many specialities in the hospitals in London so if you want to work in a specific area you get the opportunity to.

If you could go back in time and give some advice to yourself when you were a student and applying for jobs, what would you say?

Don't let people put you off. Older nurses say that you should go to the wards first but I think if there's an area if you specifically want to do, then you should go for it.

Take into consideration the distance when you're travelling. If your house is far away from where you're working after a 12 hour shift you're going to be knackered. So you need to remember that if you have a two-hour journey, think about early mornings as well. If you're applying for somewhere go for a visit to get to know the area. Learn as much about the hospital that you're applying to that you can, what their values are, if they are working on anything new - that shows that you've done your homework in the interview.

Sally Barbrook, nurse educator

My experience on rotation: Sally Barbrook

Sally Barbrook is passionate about rotational nursing. The benefits are that it gives nurses wide experience

and improves their practice making it more holistic, but she says nurses need to be adaptable and great communicators to thrive through the changes.

She studied at London Southbank University and chose to do the rotation scheme when she first qualified as a nurse in 2014. She now works as a clinical facilitator at North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT).

What did you do when you first qualified as a nurse?

When I was newly qualified I went straight on to rotation in adult nursing. I would recommend it. You have to be adaptable because you are moving around every six months. You have to be a good communicator and generally good with people to get the best out of it, to be able to adapt to different work environments and different types of nursing.

The Trust that I worked with are very supportive. You have your preceptorship which was six months when I did it but is now 12 months, so that supports you from growing from a student nurse to becoming a qualified nurse. I was on a mental health acute ward for six months as part of the rotation. It was a fast learning. I'm the clinical facilitator now in NELFT and I support rotation programmes for nurses.

What did you get out of the rotation programme?

I'm now a much more holistic practitioner. When I look at a person I don't just see a respiratory disease or anxiety, I think that they are intrinsically linked. So for me the rotation embedded that in me. Nursing can be very separate in the way that we are taught at university. Rotation has enabled me to be a much more holistic practitioner.

Would you recommend working in London after you qualify?

Because of the diversity of cultures and the variety in demographics and epidemiology, I think it makes it a very interesting place to work. I personally live out in the countryside and I travel in everyday. For someone that doesn't live in London I prefer working in the city because I feel you have a lot more scope in your practice. For me that's important. There's also more opportunity. And you can get the training to support the practice. So there's a lot of education opportunities being more in London. I don't love the commute - I don't think anyone does. But I don't mind commuting because my job enables me to use a big skillset.

What do you enjoy about your job?

What I like about my current job is that I am able to support the nurses I manage from a position of knowing what it's like being in their role. Sometimes managers don't know how it feels to be in the role that you're managing, whereas because I've had the rotational experience I understand the practice. I feel like this role uses a lot of my skills.

What do you find challenging about it?

Nursing is going through a lot of changes at the moment. Working through and making it more integrated is a challenge. People's mindsets are changing. It might be a challenge but I'm focused on making the changes that we can fit the government agenda.

If you could go back in time and give some advice to yourself when you were a student and applying for jobs, what would you say?

If you stay in the Trust that you trained in that can be positive because it's quite daunting when you first qualify and get that first job. For me, staying in the same Trust has really helped. They've been very supportive.

I'd also say to believe in yourself when you first qualify because you feel like you're starting afresh, but we have gained a lot of skills over those three years of training. We probably are a lot further on than we think.

If you build relationships when you're a student, the chances are you're going to be working with those people. It's very important to maintain professional relationships when you're newly qualified. Having a mentor, someone who's willing to look out for you, is really helpful.

I'd say just put yourself out there and open yourself up to opportunities, because they're there. And if you come across the right attitude you will be invested in. I've been invested in a lot and I'm putting back into the system because I've stayed with the same Trust. They've given to me so I think it's important for me to give back. I was given a lot of support and training and a lot of educational programmes supported the rotation while I did it. For me, that was really important as a newly qualified. Having that continuation of the adult nursing skills training. So I'd say to be open to possibilities.

Sarah-Louise Murray, acute medical unit

My first job as a nurse: Sarah-Louise Murray

Studied at Middlesex University and now works in the Acute Medical Unit (AMU) at North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust

What's your experience of working as a newly qualified nurse?

I didn't do a placement on the AMU as a student so I wasn't sure what to expect. I soon learnt that it was very busy. None of my placements had been acute, so I wasn't used to the fast pace of it. I spent six months learning my time management, I had to zone in and focus on it. After six to eight months I felt like I understood the ward.

Then after 10/11 months I started to be in charge. You have to look after all 39 beds and coordinate care on a shift. It's hectic. It's a different type of time management. It's a different type of stress. You have to look at the whole ward instead of your six to eight patients. You're responsible for making sure things are done when they are meant to be.

But it's enjoyable. It's something that I feel like I can do now because I took my time, I pushed myself in the first six to eight months I didn't do extracurricular activities. I solely focused on getting my nursing skills up to a place where I felt they were good. I feel like that assisted me to be able to be in charge. I am now able to see the bigger picture of what is happening on the ward.

Why did you decide to work on the Acute Medical Unit?

I wanted a bit more patient care than in urgent and emergency care, so the next thing was AMU. We assess patients. I thought it would be a great place to learn because of various things coming through the door. They have a large area of cardiology patients. I thought that that would again be a great learning opportunity. There's various pathways to specialising from here. It can teach you a lot.

What do you enjoy about your job?

I like the fact that it's a fast-changing environment, but not as fast as A&E. I like that there's more patient care than A&E, even if it's just for one or two days. You get to know a patient a bit. You get to understand their diagnosis. I like that it changes every day.

What do you find most challenging about your job?

The most challenging thing sometimes is the cut between time management and prioritising. Sometimes you might have two sick patients in two separate bays and they both need the same amount of attention. That can be quite difficult. But the good thing is that we have a great team. We have good sisters, deputy ward managers, and they step in and assist which makes AMU all the better. There is a good sense of solidarity within the unit, so you don't feel like you're alone.

How did you find the preceptorship?

My preceptor was very good. She made time to answer questions. If we were on shift together she would always ask how I found it. What I found good, what I found bad, and she'd ask if I needed help. Even though she's a sister on the ward, it never felt like going to her would stop her from doing her job. She was just very helpful. And I think working with her assisted in things like the time management, she would give me hints and tips and helped me progress.

Why did you decide to stay in London after you qualified?

I'm a Londoner. I don't know where I would go that would give me the same busy-ness that London does. I thought North Mid would be a great place to start. I did training at North Mid hospital and I've not come across a staff member who's been unhelpful. Everybody's happy. Everybody's welcoming. Everybody's helpful.

If you could go back in time and give some advice to yourself when you were a student and applying for jobs, what would you say?

I would say don't rush into it. Go to various hospital open days. Get an understanding of the different wards that are out there and what they can bring to you, what the learning opportunities are, what the career development opportunities are, if there's career progression and how good would the career progression be. I would say to look at rotations. And think about your commute to and from the hospital to ensure that's manageable.

Ensure you have people to talk to, whether that be the educational link, your preceptor, your manager. If anything is bothering you at the start, managers, student links, work links, educational links can be really helpful. The educational link is the team within the hospital who do the preceptorship and various courses and study days. They are good people to talk to and they could be a good advocate if there's something you want to say and don't know how to talk to your manager.

Once you do start your job take it in stages. There's no need to rush. You have the rest of your career to do various things. Get the basics underway first.

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