Answering your questions on the Nursing Associate role

January 2019

What is a nursing associate?

The nursing associate is a new support role in England that bridges the gap between care assistants and registered nurses. Nursing associates deliver hands-on, person-centred care for patients and service users in a range of case settings.

*Pictured: Trainee nursing associate Emma Henderson from West Yorkshire.*

Nursing associates are new members of the care team, who are trained to nursing foundation degree level. They work with people of all ages and in a variety of settings in health and social care. The role also provides a progression route into graduate level nursing.

The role has been introduced to help build the capacity of the nursing workforce and support nurses and the wider multidisciplinary teams to focus on more complex clinical duties.

What can nursing associates do?

The NMC has developed and published robust standards of proficiency for nursing associates. These standards of proficiency provide a clear picture of what nursing associates know and can do when they join the register. These standards help employers to understand what nursing associates can contribute to the provision of nursing care.

Like nurses and other healthcare professionals, nursing associates may expand their scope of practice, within the regulatory framework, through further education and experience after they have qualified and joined the nursing associate part of the NMC register.

Guidance has been developed by the Health Education England Nursing Associate Implementation Group to help employers to develop their job descriptions for qualified nursing associates. This guidance provides prompts to support consideration of the specific responsibilities and expectations of the post, tailored to the organisation and the setting it is being deployed into. The guidance also includes a template person specification for the role, which aligns to both the NMC’s standards of proficiency and the relevant agenda for change job profile.

Nursing associates can undertake the administration of medicines as part of their role, following additional training, education and required governance structures. HEE has published advisory guidance setting out the expectations for nursing associates who administer medicines to patients.

How qualified are nursing associates?

All nursing associates benefit from two years of study in higher education and meet the NMC’s standards of proficiency. The NMC requires nursing associate’s programmes to be at
Foundation Degree level (this is the equivalent to Level 5 in the England QAA educational framework).

**How are nursing associates regulated and inspected?**

The nursing associate role will be regulated in England by the NMC, the body responsible for regulating the nursing and midwifery professions. The title nursing associate is protected in law in England and only those qualified and registered as nursing associates will be able to use this title.

**What opportunities does the introduction of this role present?**

The nursing associate role is designed to provide employers with a wider skill mix within teams. Nursing associates deliver a higher proportion of fundamental patient care as part of the nursing team and support registered nurses by undertaking some of the caring skills and responsibilities that both roles can deliver. This provides capacity for nurses and the wider multi-disciplinary teams to focus on elements of more complex care.

*Pictured: trainee nursing associate Oleogum Ologum from Derby.*

**What impact will nursing associates have on the health and care workforce?**

The impact of nursing associates on patient experience and outcomes is taken very seriously. As the first cohorts of nursing associates complete their training and are deployed in the workforce as part of a carefully considered skills mix we recognise the need to establish a robust evidence base for their impact within the health and care workforce. As such, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and HEE are working to plan and deliver a thorough programme of research to evaluate the impact of nursing associates within the health and care workforce moving forwards.

**When will we see the first nursing associates entering the workforce?**

The first cohort of nursing associates will complete their training in December 2018, and will enter the workforce from January 2019, joining the NMC register from 28 January 2019. Nursing associates will be deployed in a range of health and social care settings.
How did nursing associates come about?

The nursing associate role was developed following the publication of The Shape of Caring Review, (Raising the Bar) in March 2015 by Health Education England (HEE). This report suggested an outline concept for a role to bridge the gap between care assistants and registered nurses.

HEE established test site partnerships across the country to deliver the first trainee nursing associate programmes. The first 1,000 trainees began in January 2017, and 11 test site consortia were chosen to deliver two-year nursing associate training programmes. These test sites brought together a range of health and care settings, including: care homes, acute, community and mental health trusts and hospices. This range of care settings represents the variety of places where nursing associates may be deployed once qualified and registered.

A further 24 test sites were chosen to carry out training for a cohort of 1,000 further trainee nursing associates from April 2017. This has now been further scaled up and rolled out across the country.

The trainee nursing associates from the first test sites have now completed their training and many will be able to apply to join the nursing associate part of the NMC register which opened 28 January 2019. HEE has published infographics showing the timeline to registration.

In addition to the 2,000 people who started training as part of the pilot cohorts, the Government has committed to training up to a further 5,000 nursing associates in 2018, and 7,500 in 2019.

The nursing associate role is regulated in England by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the body responsible for regulating the nursing and midwifery professions. All the regulatory requirements that apply to nurses and midwives will also apply to nursing associates in England, including revalidation.

Where can I find out more?

Information and case studies are available from HEE.

Visit our NHS Health Careers service website for more information about becoming a nursing associate.

Contact HEE if you have queries about nursing associates or any area of our work.