

Sarah Adamson

Sarah is based at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, read below Sarah's case study.

A big part of being a support worker is being able to communicate clearly, you need to have good listening skills, be non-judgmental and have a high level of emotional resilience. You need to be organised, flexible and be able to work both independently and as part of the wider team. I felt that my personality and work ethic ticked a lot of these boxes and this was what attracted me to becoming a support worker.

My role as a Dietetic Assistant Practitioner is within cancer services. A key part of my role is supporting patients with their nutritional wellbeing post-radiotherapy treatment. These patients have a stable nutritional care plan from the dietitian but benefit ongoing nutritional input and this has developed and evolved into a dietetic assistant practitioner-run 'moving on' / 'next steps' clinic. During this clinic, my work involves giving patients the tools to move on through education, empowerment and self-management of nutritional needs and promote health and wellbeing

A large group of patients in this clinic have completed treatment for head and neck cancer. Some will have had feeding tubes during treatment which have since been removed as they have established back on an oral diet. Eating and drinking is a huge part of life and we often have discussions around the 'new normal' post-treatment.

Examples of support include practical strategies to help manage ongoing side effects of treatment such as taste changes and dry mouth. I may also work with patients who are trying to wean off oral nutritional supplements and/or looking to regain strength and energy levels. Involving the patient in their care, we work in partnership together to make changes that are realistic and achievable.

Patients often raise a number of issues or concerns (e.g. financial, fatigue, emotional, physical changes) during clinic appointments at what can be a very anxious time and I, therefore, have to have a very holistic and empathic approach. My work involves close liaison and MDT working with clinical nurse specialists, speech and language therapists, cancer support workers and signposting to counselling services.

I have always been interested and committed to helping others and feel I have a sensitive and empathetic approach towards our patients and their families when dealing with the problems they encounter when at their most vulnerable.

I previously worked in the dietetic department as a Band 3 dietetic assistant, my current Band 4 role was new to the dietetic department. We have developed competencies and I'm supported by a nutrition nurse who also acts as a mentor. Working through competencies has helped improved my confidence and also enable me to track my progress, particularly in the transition phase from a band 3 to a band 4 role.

I really enjoy supporting patients through their care journey. My role enables me to build positive relationships with patients and it is really satisfying when patients have got to a point where they feel confident to self-manage their own nutritional care and wellbeing.

I would encourage anyone with previous career or life experience in caring for and supporting others through difficult times and who may share some of the qualities I have mentioned, to consider becoming an AHP support worker. Yes, it can be emotionally challenging but there are lots of fun times along the way. It is so rewarding to know that the help and support you offer can have a positive influence in the pathway of those under our care.

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou