

Starting out on a clinical academic pathway: the experience of a newly-qualified nurse

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A clinical-academic nursing career – what does this mean?

A dual role integrating clinical and academic nursing. Teaching and research comprise the academic component. The post is a realisation of the clinical-academic careers initiative to enable a nurse to become competent clinically whilst offering flexible career opportunities in clinical practice, research and education (UKCRC, 2007).

Research Role

I am a PhD student registered at London South Bank University. My research project is part of a programme of research funded by the NIHR to answer the question, “Do specialist services for teenagers and young adults (TYA) with cancer add value?” I am a member of the research team and principal investigator for an in-depth case study looking at the cancer services we offer TYA across England. I am using observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis to identify what is important to young people and to the health care professionals caring for them.



BRIDGING THE GAP

“Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better”

–Florence Nightingale

Clinical Role

I work 1 or 2 days per week as a staff nurse within the Children and Young People’s Cancer Service at University College London Hospital. When I started my PhD, I began an oncology rotation as a newly-qualified nurse on the Teenage Cancer Trust ward. I spent 6 months there consolidating my basic clinical skills before moving to the children’s oncology ward for several months. I am now on my third and final placement on the TYA day care unit. The information I am collecting for my PhD is increasing my understanding of our patient’s treatment journeys.



Benefits

- The clinical academic nurse draws on clinical experience to inform the research process whilst using evidence and research findings to improve clinical practice (UKCRC, 2007).
- Clinical academic roles offer the opportunity for nurses to advance knowledge and skills in both research and clinical practice simultaneously. Synthesising these skills will enhance practice through contributing to the development of local policies and implementing national guidelines (Westwood & Richardson, 2014).

Personal reflection:

- *My research means that I am reading a lot of articles, policies and guidelines related to my field of nursing which informs the research and my practice. I have an exciting and varied working week and am part of several different teams of health and academic professionals.*
- *My study is a multi-site study so I visit many different hospitals in England to observe the variation in TYA cancer services. I aim to integrate what I learn in to my clinical practice and share it with my colleagues in the Trust.*
- *I am proud of the research that I am a part of and am hopeful I am building an exciting career in nursing to make a real difference to patient care.*

Challenges

- The UKCRC (2007) recommendations on clinical academic careers seek to establish a clearly identified and properly resourced career track for nurses who wish to pursue a clinical academic career and who are likely to lead future programmes of clinical and health related research. Currently resources are lacking and the pathways not clearly defined.
- Clinical-academic roles are not widely available or well-advertised, particularly to student nurses.

Personal reflection:

- *My situation is unique at UCLH. It is challenging being a newly-qualified nurse and part-time. I feel guilty at times for not progressing quite as fast as other newly-qualified nurses.*
- *There has not been a clear pathway for my development. I am lucky to have supportive managers and colleagues who have guided both my clinical and academic progression.*
- *Balancing my time and managing my research workload is really challenging.*
- *I have given talks to groups of student nurses about my post and many are interested in the concept but unsure where they can find out about this opportunity. There is a need to increase awareness about clinical-academic career options.*

Conclusion: I feel privileged to be in a forward-thinking and developing profession where exciting and varied career pathways are possible. A clinical academic career may provide the opportunity for nurses, at any stage in their career, to influence clinical practice, improve patient experience and drive health policy forward.



Where could a clinical-academic nursing career take me?

- NIHR post-doctoral research fellowship pathway : this will provide a structured link between clinical and academic nursing
- Develop a programme of research that leads on from BRIGHTLIGHT, aiming to improve patient care and outcomes. Alongside this, working closely with clinical teams to put evidence into practice
- Be a key driver in developing policy
- Aim to become nationally and internationally renowned for being an expert in teenage and young adult cancer care