

APPRENTICESHIPS IN OPERATING THEATRES ODP AND ASSISTANT PRACTITIONER

A case study of how apprenticeships are successfully being introduced in theatres.

Caroline Robinson the Clinical Education Lead for Operating Theatres considered why apprenticeships are a good development choice for staff in Theatres. She said that the apprenticeship route gives staff the chance to develop themselves without having to be worried about financial costs. It opens up opportunities to people who might otherwise not be able to access developmental courses. She added, as a department, using apprenticeships allows them to invest in staff who they know would be able to achieve the required skills and hit the ground running when they have completed the course. Plus, it serves as a platform for them to grow their own staff.

Caroline went on to consider the benefits of completing apprenticeships for staff who have done so. The staff who have completed an apprenticeship have become more confident in practice and are looking to work on the next level of study. This is particularly the case with the level 5 Assistant Practitioners who now want to go on to become Operating Department Practitioners. She added that they have more autonomy now to carry out roles that they couldn't do before the apprenticeship. They are now supporting others coming through the same course or 'buddying' with other staff.

Caroline felt that the department as a whole benefited from staff undertaking apprenticeships, especially the Operating Department Practitioner and Assistant Practitioner apprenticeships as they have gained the foundation skills within the perioperative department to prepare them for this type of training and this makes a massive difference in comparison to the regular external students.



Caroline explained how the people undertaking the apprenticeships had felt and been supported. She said that the first cohort of Assistant Practitioner students in 2016 enjoyed the course but found the transition over to being a student a massive learning curve. The second cohort, from 2018 – 2020 felt better about the course, as they benefitted from the experiences of the previous cohort.

Caroline went on to explain about how the 20% off-the-job training had been dealt with. She said that if the student's post had been back-filled, it was no problem to manage the off-the-job training, but if it had not, then that could be more of a challenge. She said that she had facilitated the off-the-job training by organising for the students to go to other areas that relate to theatres, such as sterile services, pre-op assessment etc. She also mentioned special teaching sessions that had been planned and put on within the department.

Caroline finished by saying that she meets regularly with managers from the surgical division to talk about workforce planning and there is a demand to take on more apprenticeship places for ODP's and AP's in the future, as a way of growing the workforce. She felt it would be useful in promoting apprenticeships if there was a higher profile, with group photos of new and completing students, or even students in practice. These could then be promoted by the Comms department. Caroline felt that this would be a good way to raise awareness of apprenticeships.