

FEATURED APPRENTICE

FERN GIBBONS NURSING ASSOCIATE APPRENTICESHIP



Torbay and South Devon
NHS Foundation Trust

Meet Fern Gibbons, a Level 5 Nursing Associate apprentice working at Torbay and South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in the Gastroenterology and Colorectal Department as part of the Stoma Team.

We spoke with Fern about her journey to become a Nursing Associate apprentice, keep reading to find out.

WHAT APPRENTICESHIP ARE YOU STUDYING AND WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE?

I gained GCSEs in secondary education and proceeded to undertake NVQ2 and NVQ3 in beauty therapy in college. Following from that, I undertook a range of jobs and eventually knew I wanted to work in the healthcare profession, joining my trust as a bank healthcare assistant in 2015 before securing a full-time position on the gastro/colorectal ward and specialising as part of the stoma care team.

In January 2019 I began studying on the FDSC Nursing Associate programme, it's a two-year undergraduate degree which involved one day a week of study (7.5 hours) and the rest of my hours made up in my usual area of clinical practice. As part of the degree I completed a total of six placements, each lasting four weeks to gain exposure and experience to comply with the genericness of the Nursing Associate role, this included the District Nursing team, General Practice, and acute wards within the hospital to gain experience in different specialities.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ROLE INVOLVE?

Once surgery is considered, I am involved by providing pre-operative counselling prior to the stoma formation surgery, I do a lot of work on the gastroenterology/colorectal ward in providing post-operative care and stoma education when it is appropriate to do so. Having a stoma formed can have a huge impact on the individual's wellbeing and as part of my role I provide a lot of psychological and emotional support as well as the physical teaching elements of stoma care.

On the ward I am involved in caring for post-operative wound care plans and provide teaching to the wider multi-disciplinary team in order to manage this. I also carry out outpatient clinics, reviewing the patients recently discharged from hospital providing their follow up appointments and additionally our patients can refer back into the service at any point during their journey. Our telephone and email service are widely used to be able to support patients with a number of interventions remotely, there has been a significant increase in this service since COVID 19.

WHY DID YOU WANT TO DO AN APPRENTICESHIP?

I struggled at school and always preferred the practical subjects as opposed to theory. This is mainly the reason I chose Beauty Therapy at college as I never thought I would be able to complete A levels, also my GCSEs did not fulfil the requirements for A levels.

I was very fortunate to be offered the opportunity to complete the Nursing Associate Foundation Degree by the Matron of the department, and despite my concerns on whether I would be good enough I was honoured to be given the opportunity to progress.

I have always had the intention to do my Registered Nurse training but when you have responsibilities it is not always a good time and seems daunting to give up your job to complete the necessary training, in my instance it would be the year access course followed by the three-year nursing degree. I feel grateful to be given an opportunity to gain an undergraduate degree alongside earning a fulltime wage to give me the prospect of development within my much-loved role as a healthcare professional.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO ONCE YOU QUALIFY?

In November 2020 I completed the degree and was awarded a Foundation Degree in Science in Nursing Associate with distinction. I have completely surpassed all of my expectations and having the support of my colleagues and family and friends was paramount in succeeding.

I have enjoyed promoting the role of the Nursing Associate within my trust, since I began there have been further cohorts beginning the programme and I have enjoyed being able to use my experience to support them throughout the programme. Using my new skills and knowledge I look forward to being able to support my team and speciality, providing the evidence-based knowledge to make more autonomous decisions in order to benefit the patients with my new qualification and confidence.

On gaining my pin, I will be able to support the Gastroenterology/Colorectal ward by undertaking regular shifts to exercise the skills not widely used in the specialist field, such as drug rounds and some assessments I do not regularly partake in. I feel honoured to be nominated to showcase my case study by the clinical education department in my trust, and I really wanted to promote that it is achievable to progress despite having concerns regarding your capability or time, it really is worth stepping out of your comfort zone as it is so rewarding in the long run.