

Real-life story - Helen Simmons

Helen wanted to become a ward nurse when she qualified, but after taking a job as theatre nurse she enjoyed it so much that she decided to continue her career in this field.



Helen Simmons Cardiac theatre sister,

Employer or university University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range Unknown

How I got into the role

When I completed my general nurses' training, there was a shortage of ward nurse jobs so I decided to take a role in theatre until a ward position became available. I had spent six weeks in the ear nose and throat (ENT) and gynaecology theatres as part of my training which gave me a taster of theatre nursing. I soon realised I was really enjoying the work and decided to pursue it as a career.

I undertook a theatre course and started work at Bristol Children's Hospital, where I went on to gain a range of theatre experience including general surgery, urology and orthopaedics. I started working in the new cardiac theatre when it opened and took up the post of cardiac theatre sister and have been working there ever since. I have also been given the opportunity to attend various professional development courses, including obtaining my diploma in operating department practice.

What I do

Most of my time is spent in theatre acting as a scrub nurse for the surgeon, which involves handling instruments, needles and swabs and assisting the surgeon wherever needed. I also undertake the circulating practitioner role which involves duties such as helping position the patient for surgery, carrying out patient safety checks, preparing the theatre equipment needed for the list, assisting the scrub nurse and general

administration duties. As the team leader in the theatre, I also organise the workload between the team members.

Outside the theatre, I liaise daily with other departments in the hospital including the sterile services department and the ward staff where I troubleshoot any problems. I am also responsible for ensuring that supplies of consumable items are available at all times and that we don't overspend. However, one of the most important and enjoyable parts of my job is acting as a learning resource to my colleagues and teaching the next generation of theatre nurses.

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The best bits and challenges

I really enjoy being part of a skilled theatre team that delivers high quality care to patients and their families. Patients rely on each one of us in the team to do our jobs well and feeling appreciated for the work we do is very rewarding.

Working in such a highly pressurised environment can be stressful and tiring. However, the job's provided me with so many great opportunities that I don't think I would have got anywhere else. Theatre nursing allows you to be in control of your own career and you can take it as far as you wish.

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