

# Real-life story – how to make the most of your e-portfolio

Dr Roxanne Keynejad works at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust as a CT1 academic clinic fellow in General Adult Psychiatry. She talked to Health Careers about how to make the most of your e-portfolio.

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If you outline an initial learning plan for each post, you will be in a better position to reflect on your learning half-way through each post and at the end.

### Benefits of an e-portfolio

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A lot of foundation doctors feel as though their e-portfolio is yet another layer of bureaucracy in their already busy lives. But actually, the e-portfolio has a range of benefits. Firstly, I think it can be a huge asset when you come to prepare for future job interviews. It enables you to collect the physical evidence to present at interview. And for all specialties except general practice, you will need to complete 'white space' questions on application forms, for which your electronic record will be invaluable.

The e-portfolio is a great tool that can help you to reflect on experiences that arise during different aspects of your training, from foundation level onwards. I think this is one of the most valuable aspects of the e-portfolio.

It really is beneficial to complete your reflections effectively and thoroughly. For example, I often wrote reflections on situations that had not proceeded as anticipated or had involved difficult encounters. You may want to reflect on how you managed a difficult situation or aspects of team-working. It is useful to think about how particular situations challenged you.

## **Purpose of an e-portfolio**

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When you come to apply for training posts, you will have a range of examples of leadership, team-working and so on. The selection panel will not have access to your e-portfolio. I believe that completing your portfolio effectively helps you to develop skills that will be required throughout your career.

Reflecting on what may not have gone as well as anticipated is good practice and is all part of the learning and training required to become an effective clinician. And the more you put into your portfolio the more you get out of it. If you approach it in a perfunctory way, you miss out on its genuine benefits, since it has the potential to act as a key resource for your own learning.

E-portfolios have been a part of my life as a doctor, from foundation training <sup>[1]</sup> onwards. All through my career, I needed to provide evidence of my learning, so developing a practical approach to completing your e-portfolio will be part of your clinical career, of which lifelong learning is a crucial aspect.

## **Structuring your e-portfolio**

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I think it's helpful to structure your e-portfolio's content. At the beginning of any rotation during your foundation training <sup>[1]</sup>, you'll need to prepare a personal development plan <sup>[2]</sup>. You need to record your objectives – for example if you are thinking about a career in surgery, then you might want to improve your suturing skills or compile a list of all of the procedures with which you have assisted. Alternatively, you might identify improving your

practical skills, such as blood-taking or canula insertion, as a goal for the next post. You can see how far you have progressed, and identify what you need to achieve in the rest of the rotation and during your next post.

Another central benefit of your e-portfolio is the way it helps with career choices. Having to apply for specialty training after you've only worked as a doctor for sixteen months is a challenge for many foundation trainees.

When you are recording your reflections, look at the situations you enjoyed most. What has gone well for you? When did you find working with patients particularly rewarding? When did you get positive feedback, from other doctors, nurses and patients? Having this kind of knowledge has really helped me to make my career decisions.

This isn't the only way that using your e-portfolio effectively can help with your career decisions. If you are interested in specialising in radiology, it isn't possible to do a radiology rotation during your foundation training [1], so you need to demonstrate evidence of your interest in and commitment to this specialty. Your e-portfolio could document evidence of your attendance at x-ray meetings or grand round presentations. Having all this recorded in your e-portfolio can be a real asset.

## **How my e-portfolio helped me**

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My e-portfolio has helped me during some of the inevitable difficult times as a junior doctor. If I had been through a difficult situation or found something upsetting it could actually be therapeutic to describe the situation in my e-portfolio. Just entering what I had found difficult and why was helpful, and writing this all down helped me to work through the issues. I could also look back on my progress to realise how far I had come in my training.

There is one final way that I feel the e-portfolio can be beneficial to any junior doctor. If you find yourself struggling during your training, perhaps with illness or personal difficulties, being able to demonstrate evidence of engagement with your training is a real asset. Not all foundation doctors find things easy, but if you can show evidence of your learning this will work in your favour. A lacklustre e-portfolio may be less well received by the ARCP (Annual Review of Competence) panel at the end-of-year review.

## **Advice and tips**

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Even if you don't use your portfolio for reflection (and of course it is recommended that you do), just having all your certificates, presentations and other electronic documents collated in one place electronically is a big advantage. You can store all your important documents as you go along, so that when you need them for job applications there they all are in one place. There is nothing worse than a scramble for lost pieces of paper when you would rather be preparing for an interview.

My last tip is to ensure you record anything positive that has happened to you. Sometimes patients and families give thank you cards to your ward or team. I always scan these into my e-portfolio. It makes a nice <sup>[3]</sup> addition to your portfolio but can also provide encouragement that your work is appreciated.

Find out more on our [e-portfolio for doctors](#) <sup>[4]</sup> page.

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#### Links

[1] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation\\_training](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation_training) [2]

[https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Personal\\_development\\_plan](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Personal_development_plan) [3]

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NICE> [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning-0/developing-your-career/learning-and-development-opportunities/developing-your/e>