

Real-life story - Nicky Coote

Nicky's day-to-day work includes contacting those who have shown interest in stopping smoking, following up referrals for stop-smoking support, providing one-to-one support for clients in clinics, and giving educational and supportive talks on how to stop smoking.



Nicky Coote Specialist smoking cessation practitioner

Employer or university Civic centre Harrow council

Salary range £20k-£30k

How I got into the role

I have always been interested in health care and had three part-time jobs, one of which was an evening job in a pharmacy (at the time I was also caring for an older person). I gradually increased my hours to become a full-time dispenser and studied for a BTEC as a dispensing technician. Later, I became a branch manager for Lloyds Pharmacy.

After this I worked as a hospital technician before becoming a health care assistant working in general practice (gaining my diploma in health and social care). It was in this role that I developed my interest in supporting smoking cessation and did the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) Level-1 and Level-2 training on-line. I enjoyed helping people to give up smoking so took up this role to focus on specialising in the area of smoking cessation.

I am now a Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) licensed practitioner (smoking cessation advisor level 3) which enables me to supply different forms of NRT directly to clients, e.g. patches, gum, sprays.

What I do

My day usually starts with picking up phone messages about people who want to stop smoking. Some referrals are made by healthcare professionals, others by members of the public who self-refer, having been given my number by a community worker or someone in the voluntary sector.

We offer our clients appointments in community-based smoking cessation clinics run across the borough. These may be held in a GP setting, a children's centre or a centre for alcohol or drug rehabilitation. I run three clinics a week. Those who are too ill or infirm and housebound are offered home visits to help them quit smoking.

I have an educational role in giving talks to groups such as the 'Healthy Hearts' forum on the benefits of stopping for the prevention of cardiovascular [1] disease. I also give bespoke presentations or workshops for those on alcohol and drug rehabilitation schemes. I provide training on Smoking Cessation Brief Advice, Level 1, to social workers, refuge centre staff and anyone with a public-facing engaging role.

I'm most proud of having given up smoking myself, and am now in a good position to help to make a difference to the lives of others.

The best bits and challenges

It can be quite a challenging listening to people's life challenges. I've learnt that in this role you have to stay focused with clients and guide the conversation. I gave up smoking myself in 2008. It's not mandatory to have been a smoker yourself although it helps me appreciate what they are going through and makes me more empathetic and credible – I'm a real person too and I could do it!

Some challenges can be in working with those who have long-term conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), those who are seriously ill or who are terminally ill and have finally decided to give up.

The history of the development of the specialist smoking cessation practitioner role and the fact that it is a non-regulated profession sometimes leads people to believe that we are untrained or that we have limited understanding of anatomy and physiology [2]. Our strength is in our specialist knowledge and understanding of smoking behaviour change.

Career plans and top tips for others

The travelling involved means that I need to be a driver and have access to a car. Because of the nature of this work you would need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. My advice for anyone interested in becoming a specialist smoking cessation practitioner would be to do the NCSCCT training online, or any locally available smoking cessation training, and then arrange to shadow someone in the role, as it's important to get a feel for how sessions are run.

I have thought about making my application to UCAS for the Nursing degree programme but I would like to be a specialist stop smoking advisor in a secondary care [3] (hospital) setting. Socially, I like to watch Rugby Union and am also developing my knitting and sewing skills. With nine godchildren I'm kept very busy with crafts.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/roles-public-health/public-health-practitioner/real-life-story-nicky-coote>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Cardiovascular>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Physiology>

[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Secondary_care