District nurse

District nurses play a crucial role in the primary healthcare team. They visit people in their own homes or in residential care homes, providing increasingly complex care for patients and supporting family members.

This page has information on being a district nurse and links to further information.

Working life

As a district nurse, you'll

- assess the healthcare needs of patients and families
- monitor the quality of care they're receiving
- be professionally accountable for its delivery

Your patients could be any age, but they'll often be elderly, while others may have been recently discharged from hospital, be terminally ill or have physical disabilities.

Download transcript [1]

You'll be visiting patients every day or more than once a day, offering help, advice and support. You may work on your own or with other groups, such as the social services, voluntary agencies and other NHS organisations and help to provide and co-ordinate a wide range of care services.

District nurses play a vital role in keeping hospital admissions and readmissions to a minimum.

As well as providing direct patient care, you'll have a teaching and support role, working with patients to enable them to care for themselves or with family members teaching them how to give care to their relatives. You'll also be accountable for your own patient caseloads.

You'll play a vital role in keeping hospital admissions and readmissions to a minimum and ensuring that patients can return to their own homes as soon as possible.
Entry requirements and training

You need to a registered adult, child, mental health or learning disability nurse to apply for a district nursing training programmes.

District nurse training programmes are known as specialist practitioner programmes and are at degree level. You can also find courses at post graduate certificate and Master's level. They are normally no less than one academic year (32 weeks) full time or part-time equivalent.

Specialist practitioner programmes comprise 50% theory and 50% practice and concentrate on four areas:

- clinical nursing practice
- care and programme management
- clinical practice development
- clinical practice leadership.

Community staff nurses can be funded onto a district nurse specialist practitioner programme via their employing organisation. Sponsorship opportunities are also available each year, usually with a September start, for applicants with the relevant registration and experience. These are advertised in the nursing press and the NHS Jobs website about six months prior to the start date.

'It's my job to assess and support patients, then co-ordinate a care package to give them the help they need.' Suzanne Whitwell, tissue viability nurse

Read Suzanne's story

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the range of skills are also needed to be a district nurse
- Find out about the training and development opportunities in district nursing

Pay and conditions

Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. District nursing jobs usually start at band 6 but there is opportunity to move up the bands with more experience. District nurses in the NHS will usually work standard hours of 37.5 per week. Terms and conditions can vary for employers outside of the NHS.

Where the role can lead
Once you have qualified as a district nurse, there are a wide range of opportunities. You may want to lead a team and become a community matron or move into teaching or clinical research.

More information on training and development in district nursing.

- Job market and vacancies

Estimates show that there are over 4,000 district nurses in today’s NHS workforce. Job and training opportunities are expected to grow as more nursing care moves out of hospitals and into the community. In 2016/17, there are anticipated to be over 500 district nursing training places available.

Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs, including those who run NHS services. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find NHS organisations on NHS Choices.

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the NHS Constitution apply in your everyday work. Find out more about NHS values.

- Further information

Royal College of Nursing
Nursing and Midwifery Council
Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association
The Queen's Nursing Institute

Other roles that may interest you

- Adult nurse
- General practice nurse
- Children's nurse
- Experienced paramedic

Partner logos