Operating department practitioner

Operating department practitioners work with patients of all ages and are involved in each phase of a person’s operation.

This page has information on being an operating department practitioner and links to further information.

Working life

You'll provide high standards of skilled care and support during each phase of a patient’s perioperative care - anaesthetic, surgical and recovery.

You'll have an important role in three of the phases of perioperative care:

- anaesthetic phase
- surgical phase
- recovery phase

The anaesthetic phase

You'll:

- assist the patient prior to surgery and provide individualised care
- need an ability to communicate and work effectively within a team
- undertake a role which will involve many clinical skills, such as the preparation of a wide range of specialist equipment and drugs. This includes; anaesthetic machines, intravenous equipment and devices to safely secure the patient's airway during anaesthesia

The surgical phase

You'll play an important part of the surgery team and will:
- prepare all the necessary instruments and equipment for the operations, including microscopes, lasers and endoscopes
- provide the correct surgical instruments and materials to the surgeon
- be responsible for surgical instruments, equipment and swabs during the operation
- act as a link between the surgical team and other parts of the theatre and hospital
- anticipate the requirements of the surgical team and respond effectively

The recovery phase

You'll:

- support the patient on their arrival into the recovery unit
- monitor a patient's physiological parameters
- provide appropriate treatment until the patient has recovered from the effects of the anaesthesia and/or surgery
- assess the patient in order to ensure they can be discharged back to a ward
- evaluate the care given during each phase

Where do ODPs work?

You'll be primarily employed within operating theatres but increasingly in other critical care areas of a hospital.

ODPs also manage the preparation of the environment, equipment and act as the link between the surgical team and other parts of the operating theatre and hospital. They must be able to anticipate the requirements of the surgical team and respond effectively.

How to become an ODP

To become an ODP you'll need to train and study at degree or diploma level. Entry requirements vary depending on where you'd like to study. You can find the ODP course to suit you using our Course Finder tool.

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the entry requirements for ODP
- Find out about the personal characteristics and skills needed for ODP
- Find out about the training and development opportunities in ODP

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. ODPs in the NHS will usually start at band 5 and work standard hours of 37.5 per week. Terms and conditions will vary for any jobs outside of the NHS

Where the role can lead
There are several routes for ODPs to further their careers including management, education and clinical research. You could also undertake further training to become a surgical care practitioner. More information on training and development in operating department practice.

Job market and vacancies

In November 2018, there were 13,731 operating department practitioners registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

There is currently a shortage of operating department practitioners across the country. The role is currently on the UK national shortage occupational list so job opportunities will continue to grow. The number of training places also increased in 2015 by 13.7% to 957.

Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs, including those who run NHS services. Vacancies for ODPs not employed directly by the NHS might be found in the nursing press and on recruitment websites.

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 the values.

Further information

College of Operating Department Practitioners

The Association for Perioperative Practice

Faculty of Perioperative Care (at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh)

Health and Care Professions Council

Other roles that may interest you

- Theatre nurse
- Theatre support worker
- General surgery
- Anaesthesia

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Links