

"I try to base my decisions on what I would want if our patients were my mum or dad."

Hazel always wanted to work with people and originally had teaching in mind. But a spell of work experience in a school helped her decide she was better suited to a career in the health sector.

Hazel Rodger

Head of Radiotherapy, Leeds Cancer Centre

Employer or university

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Salary range

£55k-£65k

Hazel Rodger

How I got into the role

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I looked at all sorts of options including nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and radiography and some volunteering and work experience helped me narrow my choice to therapeutic radiographer. The combination of using very advanced technology to treat patients and building a relationship with them over the course of their treatment was very attractive.

One of the first patients I treated as a student was an 18 year old with an aggressive cancer. We had a laugh and I know he felt 'normal' when he came for treatment when every other bit of his life was so different from his friends'. I realised what a difference we made to his last few months and it made me even more determined to complete the therapeutic radiotherapy ^[1] course.

I've done lots of leadership courses and a radiotherapy [1]-specific MSc module. They've all helped me develop, but it's all about how I apply what I learn in practice.

What I do

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As a manager I no longer actually treat patients, but every decision I make is focused on ensuring we are doing all we can to offer the best possible treatments to them.

I love that my job isn't repetitive. I can be negotiating a multi-million pound equipment contract one minute and cleaning the bottom of a patient's slippers the next (a long story!). I work with a multi-professional team to set the strategy and vision for our service, communicate to staff about the great work everyone is doing and acknowledging their successes, and ensure all staff have access to education and training opportunities to support them in their roles. Most importantly I have to ensure the service is staffed appropriately, which involves crunching lots of data and understanding how it relates to the number of staff we need and how many patients we're likely to treat in any one year.

I try to base my decisions on what I would want if our patients were my mum or dad. That was difficult recently when we lost my mum-in-law to lung cancer, but it helped me realise on a personal level what a difference we make to patients.

The best bits and challenges

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The best thing about the job is the people I work with, both staff and patients.

Of course there are challenges, but I wouldn't change a thing about my role. I have both the autonomy and support I need with a fantastic team around me. By that I mean everyone from senior managers to the cleaning and portering staff; we are all cogs in a huge wheel and none of us is more important than the other in making sure patients get the best possible service.

Life outside work

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I'm obsessed with exercise. I find running, cycling and mountaineering all help me relax and get some time away from the job; it can be all-consuming if I let it. I also enjoy rock and ice climbing which both help me focus on what's really important, ie, don't fall off this rock face or you'll die!

We try to do a departmental summer challenge every two years in aid of different charities. We invite all our colleagues and do things like caving and sea fishing, walking the three Yorkshire peaks and climbing Scafell Pike. It's great fun and helps maintain good working relationships. It's impossible to be stand offish if you've had to literally push and shove each other over obstacles in your spare time!

Career plans and top tips for others

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My next professional development step will be doing an MSc, but I'm dithering about which subject to choose. It will help raise the profile of our profession if more of us have Master's degrees and PhDs.

I'm keen on us working to improve the patient 'journey' of treatment before they even get to the radiotherapy ^[1] department. We're starting to make good progress with our speech and language, dietetics and physiotherapy colleagues to educate patients about managing their treatment and lifestyle so their experience of radiotherapy ^[1] can be improved.

The three qualities I'd say you need for this career are communication, leadership and being an opportunist. If you think a career in therapeutic radiography might be for you, go for it!

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Links

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