

Real-life story - Antoinette Jenkins

Antoinette has always been hands on in her work and worked for several years as a qualified nurse before training to become a physicians' assistant in anaesthesia*.



Antoinette Jenkins Physicians' assistant (anaesthetics)

Employer or university Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range ?40k-?50k

How I got into the role

As a nurse I got to a senior position and was being encouraged towards a management role which was something I had no interest in.

I love patient contact and caring for people and, when the physicians' assistant role was being developed, I knew it was a direction I wanted to go in. It allowed me to stay doing clinical work and use my healthcare experience and gave me the opportunity to develop my career as a different member of a multidisciplinary team.?

What I do

My days vary and I can be involved in providing general anaesthesia for operations, sedation, a PICC line [a type of catheter [1] for providing intravenous drugs] or a combination of all three.

A typical day starts the day before really. I look to see which patients are on my list for the following day, check the type of surgery they're booked in for and plan any further care they might need. I then see the patients and discuss a plan of care with my supervising consultant and the operating theatre team.?

Physicians' assistants can be seen as 'cheap doctors', or that we're stealing doctors' jobs, which isn't the case at all!

The best bits and challenges

The best bit of the job is definitely meeting people, chatting to them, gaining their trust and then caring for them to the best of my ability.

I consider it an honour to 'put someone to sleep' for their procedure - it's such a big thing for patients. Having someone say 'thank you' is amazing, not for the praise but because they've had a good experience.

One of the biggest challenges is that physicians' assistants can be seen as 'cheap doctors', or that we're stealing doctors' jobs, which isn't the case at all! We work very differently and are here to add to the clinical team, not detract from it.

For example, being able to provide PICC lines for patients can mean the difference between having to wait up to several days on an emergency list and being able to go home sooner, which in turn leaves doctors free to concentrate on the more complex cases.?

Life outside work

I love to cycle, run and go to the gym. I'm also interested in different wines (except Sauvignon Blanc!) and I generally love being around people and am interested in what they have to say. I honestly believe we can all learn something from everyone.?

Career plans and top tips for others

My nursing qualification has enhanced the care I provide. In addition, undertaking a pain management qualification gave me greater knowledge and confidence to look after patients in a surgical setting.

To be a physicians' assistant, it's important that you're caring, personable and bright. The bottom line for me is that, to do any job that involves looking after people, you need to care about them.?

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*The title of physicians' assistant (anaesthesia) changed to anaesthesia associate in July 2019.

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