

"I believe this role enhances junior doctor training, particularly in the operating theatre."

Sara enjoyed her job in theatres so much after qualifying as a nurse, she undertook extra training to become a surgical care practitioner. Find out why she finds it so rewarding.

Real-life story - Sara Dalby

Surgical care practitioner

Employer or university

Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

£40k-£50k

Sara Dalby

How I got into the role

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After I qualified as a nurse, I worked in the operating theatres and the things I enjoyed about working as a theatre practitioner were the variety and complexity of the work. I also liked being able to focus on one patient at a time, and working as part of a multidisciplinary team of surgeons, anaesthetists, operating department practitioners, radiologists and nurses.

I then had the opportunity to train as a surgical first assistant (formerly called an advanced scrub practitioner) where I got to surgically assist across different specialties, and from there I did a Master's degree in Advanced Nursing Practice, followed by Surgical Care Practitioner training.

What I do

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When I first qualified as a surgical care practitioner (SCP), I worked in colorectal ^[1] surgery but now my time is split between maxillofacial surgery and the upper limb team in orthopaedics.

There's no such thing as a typical day because it changes according to the needs of the specialty and team I'm working with. But any day can include: leading ward rounds and supporting the junior doctors on the wards; reviewing patients in clinic; assisting in theatre; undertaking surgical procedures; training and developing the team in various aspects of patient care; and attending meetings and undertaking audits.

The best bits and challenges

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This is an exceptionally rewarding role. It's allowed me to develop professionally so that I'm more confident and have a greater understanding of the patient experience because I look after patients at all stages of their care.

But working as a surgical care practitioner can also be challenging because of a lack of understanding about the role. It doesn't sit within traditional boundaries so it can be difficult to understand what we do and the contribution we make to patient care. I'm very fortunate to work with great clinicians who have always supported my development and valued the contribution I make.

When the surgical care practitioner role was first established, there were concerns it would inhibit junior doctor training. But I believe it enhances training, particularly in the operating theatre where the SCP is able to provide expert practical assistance while the surgeon trains the junior doctor.

The team around us changes quite regularly but SCPs are a constant, so we provide consistency and continuity of care which in turn enables us to help junior doctors settle in when they rotate to a new area.

Life outside work

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Outside of work I enjoy travelling, baking, reading and just generally spending time with friends and family.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I couldn't be a surgical care practitioner without undertaking the training and education that's underpinned my knowledge to make clinical decisions. My experience as a nurse has also really helped how I communicate and work within a team, as well as providing good insight into different roles, priorities and patient pathways.

I'd recommend the role to anyone! It's challenging in a number of ways but exceptionally rewarding. The main elements of the role are team working, flexibility, the need to be conscientious and good communication skills linked to sound clinical knowledge and an understanding of personal limitations - all of which lead to high standards of care for patients and healthy working relationships.

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Links

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