Real-life story - Samantha Hayhurst

Samantha’s interest in science led her to a degree in biomedical science at the University of Sheffield. After working as a science teacher for a short time, Samantha successfully applied for the NHS Scientist Training Programme.

Samantha Hayhurst

Trainee clinical scientist

Employer or university
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Salary range
£25k-£35k

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- **How I got into the role**

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When I was growing up my mum was a midwife and my aunt was a district nurse, so I'd always been exposed to healthcare. I was fascinated by the stories my mum had to tell and her obvious passion for her job.

In my final year of university, I read about the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP [1]) but missed the application deadline. In my haste I ended up training as a science teacher and working in a high school. In my second year of teaching I realised this wasn't the job for me, and I missed being involved in 'hands-on' science.

I decided to apply for the gastrointestinal physiology [2] and urodynamics specialism of the STP [1]. I was instantly drawn to this area. Problems encountered in these areas are not often life threatening but can completely disrupt a person's life and I decided I wanted to be involved in helping these people.

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What I do

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As I specialise in gastrointestinal (GI) physiology [2] and urodynamics, my work is split between the GI physiology [2] department and the urology department.

Whichever department I'm working in I usually spend the first half-hour dealing with emails and other admin work. In GI physiology [2] we conduct a range of different investigations and treatments, including upper and lower GI function tests, sacral nerve stimulation and biofeedback.

A typical GI function test is oesophageal manometry, where the strength and coordination of muscles in the oesophagus (food pipe) are assessed. In this investigation a thin pressure sensitive catheter [3] is passed up the nose, down the back of the throat and down the oesophagus into the stomach. The patient is asked to take small sips of water through a straw, and the pressure throughout the oesophagus can be monitored.

In urology a typical morning might consist of an ambulatory urodynamic study to assess bladder function, which is conducted under the supervision of a nurse specialist. During an ambulatory study the patient is connected to a device for three hours and they are able to move around the hospital. When this is finished I usually deal with more emails and phone calls before I take a short lunch break.

The afternoons in GI physiology [2] are typical spent analysing test results and writing up reports. In urology I might spend the afternoon assisting with a video urodynamics study in the radiology department, where images of the bladder are taken using x-ray.

The work is incredibly varied, involving a wide range of investigations and treatments and many different patients. I work alongside doctors, nurses, radiographers, physiologists, clinical scientists, apprentices and admin staff.

- ## The best bits and challenges

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The best part of my job has to be how varied each day is. The variety of tests and treatments means that every day is different and you always have something new to learn. I get to meet lots of wonderful, interesting patients who definitely make every day worthwhile!

When I started I found it difficult because I wanted to do everything, know everything and be good at everything straight away. There’s a lot to learn, and the majority only comes with experience!

- ## Life outside work

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It is important to be organised to ensure that both work commitments and university commitments are met. But it is also important because you can easily get consumed by the work that needs to be done and allow it to eat up your free time. I go to weekly dance lessons, and I always make sure I get there no matter how demanding my workload.

- ## Career plans and top tips for others

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The NHS Scientist Training Programme is a three year training programme in which you work full time and complete your Master's degree in parallel. I am currently completing my MSc in clinical science through Newcastle University. You complete the Master's degree on a part time basis. I attend on average one two-week teaching block per year, which consists of lectures, seminars and interactive workshops. I have assignments to complete throughout the year and annual exams.

At work I'm encouraged to attend courses and training days, whether that is in-house training or courses held at other venues.

My tips for others are if you're planning to apply for the STP [1] make sure you do your research carefully. There are a variety of different specialisms which you can apply for, so read about each specialism and ensure you understand what it involves. Try to organise a visit to your local hospital too to observe your preferred specialism and speak to people already doing the job. Not all hospitals provide all specialisms so make sure you do your research to find your nearest centre.

To work in GI physiology [2] and urodynamics you must be empathetic, have unlimited patience and be a good listener. Patients are often upset or anxious and sometimes just need someone to talk to.

Links
[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#STP [2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Physiology [3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Catheter