

"I was the first person in my family to go to university, which was a little scary. I didn't need to worry as there's so much support for nursing students."

Read about Cherie's journey into nursing to discover what it's really like to work with us.

Cherie Lawrence

Mental health nurse and clinical team leader

Cherie became a mental health nurse after suffering from depression as a teenager. She now works for Nottinghamshire Healthcare and is preparing for a role as a ward's manager.



Why did you become a mental health nurse?

I became a mother unexpectedly at 17 and suffered from depression both during and after my pregnancy. Unfortunately, at the time, there wasn't that much information out there, so to try and understand my condition, I did a community mental health course and discovered a passion for the subject – I found it really fascinating.

I've always admired nurses so it seemed like the obvious thing to do. I also felt like a nursing career would help me be a positive role model for my daughter.

How did you become a mental health nurse?

I studied for my degree in mental health nursing at Nottingham University.

I was actually the first person in my family to go to university, which was a little scary. I didn't need to worry as there's so much support out there for nursing students. I really enjoyed my degree. I had a variety of placements where I was able to get really valuable experience. I worked in hospital and community settings, with young and older people, and with patients with functional dementia.

What are some of the benefits of nursing?

Mental health nurses are really in demand so I was contacted about job opportunities all the way through my degree and was offered a choice of four jobs when I graduated.

Unlike quite a lot of other professions, being a nurse is a guaranteed job for life, which means I'm never going to have to worry about providing for my daughter.

How have you been supported in your career?

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I'm so glad I chose to work for Nottinghamshire Healthcare, as they offer so much support to newly qualified nurses. I think some people worry about the responsibility they'll have on the job, but Nottingham runs an amazing preceptorship programme which helps bridge the gap between being a student nurse and a qualified nurse.

They make sure you're really supported with regular group and one-to-one meetings, where you can discuss any issues you may have. They also ensure you have access to further education, such as safeguarding training.

What is your day-to-day like?

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No two days are ever the same – I go to work each day never knowing what to expect, which keeps things really interesting.

I work as part of a team that cares for a range of patients across the hospital with a variety of problems. I look after patients' physical health, diet and fluid intake and their

mental wellbeing.

I think some people may view mental health nursing as being tough. While there are challenging times, there are also a lot of lovely things that we get to do with our patients, such as going out for a walk or shopping. This helps bring some normality and experience of life outside of the ward. I love this aspect of the job.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

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I love the variety of people I get to meet including our amazing staff. I work with a very supportive team that feels like my extended family.

I am also passionate about supporting and leading my team in their roles and I strongly believe that as staff, we need to role model patient-centred care. It is incredibly rewarding to see the difference we make to the lives of our patients.

What's next for you?

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I'm a mentor and teach at the University of Nottingham. I'm also an NHS ambassador for mental health nursing. I attend council meetings for my employer and I'm leading on a lot of projects. The opportunities are endless within my profession.

Next up for me is likely a ward manager's position, which my team and employer are helping me to prepare for.

Top tips for others?

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I think it's important for people interested in nursing to understand how much support there is for students and newly qualified nurses.

The job is so varied and there are many opportunities to develop your career and to continue to learn new skills.

I feel so proud of who I am today, proving everyone who doubted me wrong. Don't let anything or anyone get in your way, just go out there and achieve your goals.

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