

"Knowing that I'm helping people find solutions to health-related issues that impact their daily lives gives me great satisfaction."

Rita puts her nursing and paramedic training to good use in her job as an occupational health adviser, and is proud of the difference the role makes.

Rita Bains

Occupational health advisor

Employer or university

East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Salary range

£25k-£35k

Rita Bains

How I got into the role

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I've always had a passion for helping others, which led me to nursing at a young age. After qualifying as a registered general nurse in 1998, I worked in a hospital setting and took on bank shifts in A&E to gain broader experience. During this time, I became interested in becoming a paramedic after working closely with them and ambulance technicians. Given that paramedic work wasn't a traditional career in my culture, I had to convince my family that it was a fulfilling and worthwhile role, which I'm pleased to say I did.

I went on to complete a foundation degree in paramedic science from the University of Hertfordshire, qualifying in 2006. I began my paramedic career on ambulances and later moved to a fast response vehicle. After a brief return to nursing in 2010, I felt the pull back to the emergency sector and joined ambulance control as a nurse adviser, where I spent several rewarding years. Recently, I moved into occupational health, an area where I felt I could combine my extensive clinical background with a focus on preventive health and wellness in the workplace.

What I do

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As an occupational health advisor, I support the health and well-being of employees across our organisation.

I conduct regular health screenings, provide advice on managing work-related health risks, and offer guidance on maintaining a healthy work-life balance. I also assist employees in managing long-term health conditions that may affect their ability to perform at work, ensuring they have the support they need to succeed.

The best bits and challenges

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The most rewarding aspect of my role is helping people feel supported and valued in their workplace by promoting healthier lifestyles and well-being. Knowing that I'm helping people find solutions to health-related issues that impact their daily lives gives me great satisfaction.

One challenge in occupational health is addressing misconceptions about the role; many people are unaware of the critical support that occupational health provides. Balancing the needs of both employees and management can also be complex but is essential for creating a healthy workplace.

Life outside work

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My work as a paramedic used to keep me physically active, which I now miss in my current role. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, I make time for the gym three times a week.

Being a lone parent to two young children (ages seven and ten) and working full time keeps me busy and on my toes. My daughter aspires to follow in my footsteps in healthcare, and whenever she sees an ambulance, she says, "Mummy used to drive ambulances, and I want to help people too!"

Career plans and top tips for others

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I'm very proud of my career path and all I've achieved. My journey - from nursing to pre-hospital care, emergency triage, and now occupational health - has been filled with learning and growth. My advice to others is to develop strong communication skills as they're crucial in building rapport with patients and colleagues. Empathy, patience, and a genuine desire to help others are also vital.

Recently, I completed a black and minority ethnic leadership course with the NHS Leadership Academy, which has been valuable for my career development. I'm now looking into advanced training in occupational health to expand my expertise in this area. I am grateful for the support from my managers who encourage my professional development and helped me realise my potential.

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