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Training and development (mental health nursing)

This page has information on the training and development opportunities in mental health nursing.

After qualifying as a mental health nurse [1], your learning and development doesn't end. To provide the best possible care, you need to be committed to learning and always keep your skills and knowledge up to date.

Registration and revalidation

As a mental health nurse, it's vital to be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the regulatory body in the UK that confirms that you can practise as a registered nurse or midwife.

To maintain your registration to practise with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, you'll need to go through the process of revalidation every three years, to confirm that you continue to practise safely and effectively, and that you have remained up to date.

Find out more about revalidation from the NMC [2].

Development opportunities

Being a mental health nurse is one of the most adaptable roles in mental healthcare which means nurses can work in a huge variety of roles and settings. There are also a number of established progression routes.

Becoming a nurse specialist

One of the ways to progress your career is to work with a specific client group, or in a specific field of intervention. Lots of UK mental health nurses become renowned experts in fields of practice such as:

- working with children or in older people's services
- working in drug and alcohol treatment services
- talking therapies
- working in prisons with offenders

Those who retain clinical practice as a core part of their role can progress to being an advanced clinical practitioner or even a nurse consultant. Many occupy these roles also spend part of their time on research and improving best practice in their specialist area.

'I was the first female charge nurse to join a unit specialising in family therapy for adolescents considered at risk of offending'. Lisa Maclean, senior lecturer in nursing

Becoming a nurse leader

Another way to progress within the role of mental health nurse is to begin to lead and develop services in mental healthcare. This could be becoming a ward manager within a hospital, where a nurse leads a team of nurses and other professionals.

However, leadership in healthcare can mean much more than managing a team of people, and some mental health nurses go on to do things like influence healthcare policy, talking to government and other agencies about the best way to make treatments available and high quality.

The NHS Leadership Academy runs a number of programmes to support nurses into leadership roles. There's a programme for nurses at all levels of their career.

Find out more about the NHS Leadership Academy and its programmes [4].

Becoming a nurse educator

Developing and supporting the next generation of healthcare professionals is just as important as having a long and successful career as a mental health nurse.

Mentors

Practising mental health nurses have a duty to support and help train student nurses and learners from other healthcare professions. This can be achieved through a specific course to become a recognised nurse 'mentor'. Experienced nurse mentors can become 'sign off mentors' which allows them to say whether or not a nursing student has the practical skills, qualities and ability to become a registered nurse.

Preceptors

Newly qualified nurses also need support to develop their skills. Competent, experienced mental health nurses can help by taking on the role of 'preceptor' who assists newly qualified nurses in finding their feet. Those learning to be specialists in community nursing have a 'practice educator' supporting them.

Lecturers

Nurses can also decide to do some academic study leading to a recognised teaching qualification to become a recognised teacher. This allows nurses to become a lecturer or nurse academic at a university who teach student and current nurses. It is now common for nurse lecturers and academics to combine direct teaching with research and publication work.

Nursing careers resource

A careers resource has been jointly developed by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Health Education England (HEE) to help registered nurses and the clinical support workforce plan their health careers effectively. It shows different ways that you can develop your career from a band 5 role with case studies, videos and next steps.

Visit the RCN/HEE careers resource for registered band 5 nurses [5]

Partner logos

Royal College of Nursing

[6]
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Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/considering-or-university/studying-nursing>

[2] <http://revalidation.nmc.org.uk/welcome-to-revalidation/> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/mental-health-nurse/real-life-story-lisa-maclean> [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/nhs-leadership-academy> [5] <https://www.rcn.org.uk/nursingcareersresource>

[6] <https://www.rcn.org.uk/>