Career Pathways in Research: Clinical Pathway

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This article within the series of career pathways is to inform you of what may be considered an exciting development on the career pathway for nurses in clinical practice, the facility to be develop your clinical expertise to consultant level.

Introduction

The new clinical grading structure set out in Making a Difference (DoH 1999), together with the introduction of nurse consultants, has re-emphasised the need for experienced and qualified research and practice development leadership in clinical settings in the NHS. This hopefully will provide improved career progression and better opportunities to combine or move laterally between jobs in practice, education and research.

Although, the conceptual framework proposed by Kim Manley (1997) of educator, researcher and consultant, augmented by strong leadership. It appears that not all those employed in these new posts are experienced researchers, hence a need in the first instance for support for these nurses from academic institutions. However, they all should have a good understanding of research evidence and how to apply it - evidence based practice - is a central component of all nurse consultant activity. The recommendation from the R&D Workforce Capacity Development Group (1998) chaired by Maggie Pearson, should be accepted by health care professionals that ‘R&D skills and experience can be valued and enabled within professional career structures’. A track record of evidence based practice development activity needs to be developed, and this includes specific clinical issues (e.g. pressure area care) and also organisational and environmental activity to promote an evidence based culture (e.g. journal clubs, or a programme of developing evidence based protocols).

In Wales, one of the aims of the strategic framework document, “Realising the Potential” was; “to ensure that all nurses, midwives and health visitors develop their practice in a reflective and evidence based manner; founded upon a standard of education which enables them to practise as equal partners with other health care professionals, supported by continuing professional development and clinical supervision.” Indeed, to facilitate this it has been proposed to establish in Wales an academy of subject based faculties that would be a source for excellence in care, evidence based practice and the development of clinical leadership.

However, in Scotland the management executive wants to create a greater flexibility for staff employed within the NHS to tackle the apparent rigidity in access to professions, career pathways, reward mechanisms and developmental opportunities. In this document, “Learning Together,” the management aimed to establish a working party to look at all aspects of the nursing career structure including the implementation of nurse, midwife and health visitor consultant posts.

It was proposed on ‘Making a difference’ (1999) that there should be a new career framework for nurses, midwives and health visitors and this should include consultant nurse posts. Broadly, there are two types of nurse consultant posts described - those working and funded solely in the NHS and those with joint NHS/University funding. For those in joint funded posts there is likely to be more of an emphasis on taking forward new research studies, preferably as part of a multidisciplinary research team. Individuals with this role will be expected to have a strong track record in undertaking...
research and development projects, with a history of publication. As well as being experienced researchers themselves they should appreciate the benefits of including specialists in developing research studies, for example, epidemiologists, methodologists, statisticians and health economists.

In Table 1 we have set out a typical clinical career pathway leading to nurse consultant ("Making a Difference" level 4). This is not meant to be a prescriptive framework but simply indicative of the typical role, experience, knowledge, training, skills and qualifications one might normally expect at each level following consultation nationally

**Career development**

Pre-registration nurse education prepares you for a clinical career. It is this career pathway that most people have in mind when they first begin nursing, and this pathway sets out three distinct levels ("Making a Difference" levels 2, 3 and 4 - level 1 is for health care assistants).

At the Registered Nurse level you are in your early post-registration phase, consolidating your experience and developing your competencies, skills and confidence. We have not distinguished between nurse practitioner and clinical nurse specialist as different organisations use these different titles to describe similar role unlike in the United States where there is a clear and agreed difference in role between professionals with these titles. However, the clinical nurse specialist and the nurse practitioner both have to practice at the same level of competence.

Although, it may be acknowledged that masters level of educational is considered the gateway to specialist positions (Manley and Garbett., 2000) for those without this prerequisite qualification other factor may be taken into account such as recognition by peers, length of clinical experience, personal qualities, professional activities and status. At this level nurses have developed specialist expertise and are working at a higher level of practice would be expected to be engaged in evidence based practice development, implying education and training in research and research implementation.

The nurse consultant role is new, and therefore managers and Trusts are still feeling their way in terms of what sort of skills and experience a nurse consultant would, and can be expected to have even though these are documented (Manley, 1997). As this is a newly accepted role for nurses, they have not received specific training pathways to prepare them, so there needs to be some flexibility in the early stages of nurse consultant recruitment. For many nurse consultants there will be a significant amount of professional development activity which will be essential to widen their requisite range of leadership, educational ability, research expertise and adviser.

**Benefits of a Clinical Career**

- allows you to progress your clinical career with academic and financial recognition
- ability to utilise research evidence to base current practice for the development and improvement of nursing care
- ensuring delivery of care is based on high quality research
- to have functional dialogue with colleagues to take new initiatives forward
- ability to develop an active research component in your job allowing you and colleagues to engage in innovative and exciting research projects.
• to develop and apply leadership skills

**Drawbacks of the Clinical Career**

• lack of quality research to base practice
• dealing with colleagues that may not value research evidence as reason to change practice
• lack of research and development skills
• keeping up to date with central policy initiatives and taking them into account when developing services
• need to set boundaries to job description and not take on too much

**Links To Other Pathways/Careers**

Education, research, development and evaluation are all key features of a nurse consultant's role, and much of this expertise can be gained in other settings. For example, the Research Support/Management pathway and the Academic pathway (described in articles within this series) enable individuals to gain experience in all these areas. A good clinical CV will enable you to obtain work in a number of settings - overseas, the private sector, clinical governance, and also as an independent consultant or expert witness. In addition, some nurses may move forward from their clinical career into a management. Using their clinical knowledge and experience to help manage and run health services so from consultant nurse the next level would be to senior nurse, then to deputy executive director up to Nurse Executive Director.

**Qualifications**

As well as specialist qualifications in an area of clinical practice, nurse consultants would have a postgraduate qualification in an area related to practice development (e.g. Masters in Advanced Health Care Practice) or a research qualification (e.g. PhD on a relevant topic). However, there are opportunities for nurses to undertake a taught doctorate (McKenna 2001), a thesis based doctorate by portfolio or clinical doctorate and these will create the natural training ground for future nurse consultants.

**Protected Time**

The Royal College of Physicians organises a voluntary clinical professional development programme (CPD) which is recommended for all members to undertake 50 hours each year half of which would be within their own institution. From April this year the RCP would like to add to these hours a further 25 over the following next 5 years for professional development specifically for research and teaching. The recent Welsh document ,”Creating The Potential” states there should be a professional commitment to life long learning with opportunities and entitlements to protected time similar to other health professionals. Under Clinical Governance it is considered important that nurses as well as other health professionals have protected time for reflection, dialogue and to consider outcomes.
Funding
Clinical posts are funded through the NHS and are therefore relatively stable and secure. All nurse consultant posts have to be agreed by the Regional or National Office and funding for continuation of these posts found locally. Joint funding between the NHS Trusts and Universities may become a feature of nurse consultant posts in the future.

Pay scales
Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Nurse Specialists range from F up to I grades on the existing clinical grading system. Nurse consultant posts can range up to £45,050, although some are initially being set at I grade level (around £27,000).

Table 1. Guidance for pay scales in the clinical arena

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/position</th>
<th>Pay ranges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurse (level 2/3)</td>
<td>£16,510 to £19,935</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinical nurse specialist</td>
<td>£18,310 to £31,620</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurse practitioner</td>
<td>£18,310 to £28,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse, midwife, health visitor consultants</td>
<td>£29,450 to £45,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Curriculum Vitae
Although personnel departments like to see a completed application form, it is usually good practice to also send a detailed curriculum vitae (CV), especially for senior appointments, as a clear CV is often preferred by managers. This does not mean the precise documentation of all your activities at work and at play from secondary school onwards. It is actually a document that illustrates your achievements and abilities, in order to demonstrate your appropriateness for employment for the job advertised. It has to be remembered that those wishing to employ new staff have normally decided the essential and desirable characteristics required, so in reading your CV they need to feel that you have considered these necessary requirements.

Places jobs advertised
Nursing Standard
Nursing Times
Health Services Journal
Guardian (Wednesday)
Example job adverts

**Nurse Consultant - Primary Care (£31974 - £36029 p.a. London)**

Walk into a unique and exciting opportunity for an experienced nurse to advance primary care nursing.

We are looking to appoint a nurse consultant for the Croydon NHS Walk-in Centre. This will be a joint appointment with Kingston and St George's Healthcare Faculty to provide the research support to the new services now emerging in primary care.

You will work part-time within the nursing team as a practising clinician at the Walk-in Centre to develop high quality, open access services to the population, focusing on socially excluded groups. In addition, you will undertake ongoing evaluation and research into the changing interface and impact of Walk-in Centres and shifting professional boundaries. You will contribute to curriculum development in clinical decision-making and nurse leadership and provide specialist input to current modules at principal lecturer level.

Are you a masters degree nurse with advanced nursing skills? Could you take on the challenge to lead primary care nursing to develop the New NHS? If so, we would like to hear from you.

For further information, please contact ....

**Children's Diabetic Specialist Nurse, Paediatrics (Grade G / £20830 - £24090 p.a.)**

Eastern West Herts Community Health NHS Trust

We are an Integrated Children's Directorate, situated throughout West Hertfordshire with acute sites at Watford and Hemel Hempstead, with a Nurse Consultant appointed.

This is a new and exciting post to develop both in-patient and community work for children & their families with Diabetes across Hertfordshire.

As well as providing clinical expertise and direct patient care, you will be highly involved in undertaking multi-disciplinary training and education.

You must be RSCN/RN (Child), with at least 3 years experience at F Grade, with the ENB 998 and the appropriate Diabetic course or a willingness to undertake one. A car driver is essential.

For further information please contact....

Feedback

Any comments or feedback that could assist other nurses to develop their career to the RCN R&D Co-ordinating Centre c/o Dave O’Carroll

www.man.ac.uk/rcn/
Acknowledgements
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Abigail Masterson, Abi Masterson Consulting Ltd,

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### Nursing Research Careers: Clinical Pathway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered Nurse (level 2/3)</th>
<th>Nurse Practitioner/Clinical Nurse Specialist (level 3/4)</th>
<th>Consultant Nurse (level 4)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Role</strong></td>
<td>Nurses working at a higher level in specific clinical areas (e.g. Primary Care, A&amp;E, Occupational Health, Walk-in Centre) or with particular patient groups (e.g. homeless, breast care, ENT, drug dependency) Assumes clinical responsibility for own patients/clients case load. Typically screens for early signs of disease and risk factors, diagnoses undifferentiated conditions, devises integrated care plan which includes nursing and medical management of care. Responsible for incorporating high quality research evidence into patient care. Identifying gaps in knowledge and prioritising for action.</td>
<td>Competence is expected in each of the four core functions: 1. Expert practice; 2. Professional leadership and consultancy; 3. Education, training and development; 4. Practice and service development, research and evaluation</td>
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<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>Interpretation and evaluation of information from diverse sources to enable informed judgements to set standards for quality and appropriate care. Continual evaluation and audit of practice, selecting and applying a broad range of appropriate, valid and reliable methods. Experience of project management incorporating patient/client involvement, ethical procedures, professional and organisational accountability and indemnity.</td>
<td>Substantial experience and record of achievement on all four core functions to be able to assume greater responsibility than level 3 practitioners. Portfolio of lifelong learning with evidence of research experience, particularly in practice-based research methodologies, practice development leadership and publications.</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge of biomedical sciences, physiology, pathophysiology, psychology, pharmacology, therapeutics, research conduct and management Knowledge of competency requirements for higher practice. Understands how to highlight gaps in knowledge to research and clinical leads. Understands how to involve patients/clients in the research process.</td>
<td>Knowledge of nursing values, skills, processes and outcomes. Facilitation and leadership techniques: management and quality processes. Organisational acumen. Development of policies and strategy. Transformational leadership.</td>
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<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Higher level, specialist education and training to include research, ethical, legal and professional issues.</td>
<td>Education particularly in professional supervision approaches and facilitation including ethical, legal and professional implications of higher level practice.</td>
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<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td>Ability to carry out: holistic nursing assessment, consultation/ counselling patient/clients, research in clinical practice. Able to manage research protocols, resources and develop staff members to maintain the overall standard of care. Strategic and organisational acumen to raise knowledge gap into research planning process. Professional leadership.</td>
<td>Leadership skills in practice and policy development, education and research strategy. Staff, practice and organisational development. Ability to create a learning environment: Negotiation and consultancy skills. Political acumen.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Desirable Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>First degree; Higher award; Specialist practice qualification; Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>Advanced nurse practice; Masters or Doctoral qualification</td>
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