



From apprentice to asset

When it comes to building a successful career in healthcare, nothing trumps hands-on experience. Nineteen-year-old Alex Cotterell learned this first-hand after completing the Skills for Health Level 3 Apprenticeship in Healthcare.

It was this experience as a Healthcare Assistant on Hopkins Ward and Greenlands Outpatients in the Urology Department of the Royal Berkshire Hospital that eventually led to the ward offering her a full-time post.

Taking action

Fourteen months ago Alex started the apprenticeship after discovering that the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust was participating in a pilot programme that took young people, aged 16-18, into apprenticeships in clinical environments.

It was a decisive move for Alex, who has her sights set on becoming a nurse or midwife.

Better opportunities and greater support

Before starting the apprenticeship, Alex had been studying for a Level 3 BTEC in Health and Social care, but found it didn't offer the kind of opportunities that the Skills for Health apprenticeship provided. Additionally she could only get limited experience in a hospital environment – and only through a placement.

'The apprenticeship, for me, was a step up from the BTEC,' said Alex. 'It has provided me with an understanding of the process required to look at a university degree.'

Alex was also keen to take advantage of the opportunity to earn a living alongside learning the skills – and getting the support – she needed to succeed in her career – a more inviting prospect than working in a job while attending college.



Cultivating staff development and training

Alex participated in a flexible training programme supported by her mentor, her tutor from Reading College, Pat Tucker, and Jo Sandy, practice development nurse, along with the ward staff.

Alex quickly became part of team, taking every chance to immerse herself in the inner workings of the hospital, from witnessing procedures in theatres to assisting the qualified nurses with activities on the ward.

‘The work was tricky,’ said Alex. ‘But it was amazing. I had lots of opportunities to get some experience.’

The pilot programme also allowed Ward Sister Karen Linger to ‘grow her own’ and develop Alex’s skills in a way that would benefit the ward’s own individual processes, now and in the future.

Advantages for the ward – and for Alex

Alex’s development as an apprentice has not only benefitted the ward with her assisting nurses, caring for patients and promoting awareness, but it’s also helped Alex in a way that goes beyond learning the hospital’s methods and operations.

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‘I feel like this apprenticeship has matured me, and I have grown as an individual,’ said Alex.

Thanks to the pilot programme, the department now has an excellent Healthcare Assistant on its ward, trained to the highest standards, with the right values and behaviours, and a well-practised bedside manner.

So would Ward Sister Linger take on – and recommend – young apprentices a second time? The answer is an emphatic yes.

‘Alex was so helpful for the ward as an extra pair of hands. It was the best thing we did.’

National Skills Academy for Health

9th floor
Lynton House
Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9LT

information@nsahealth.org.uk
020 7391 7173

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