

Transition to Homeless Health Nursing

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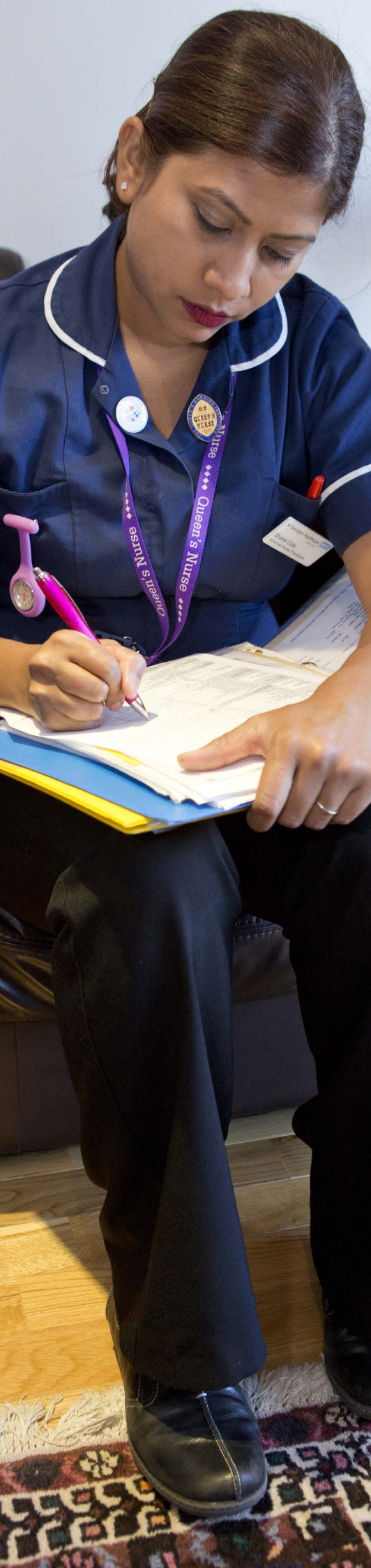
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Section B - Working in the community nursing setting

Chapter 8 - Developing your career

Completing this chapter will enable you to:

- consider the importance of continuous professional development to your career
- be aware of the standards required of a homeless health nurse
- assess your own competence
- create your own personal development plan

Introduction

It is very important to think about your skills, passions and knowledge and consider how you want to apply these as a nurse through your career. This can guide you towards the learning opportunities, roles and where you can make a real difference for people in need. This chapter considers the importance of professional development and the various options available. It also looks at the standards required of a homeless health nurse, and ways to evaluate your current skill level. Finally it looks at developing a career plan and applying for the roles where you can use your professional skills to make a real difference.

Why continuous professional development?

The overall aim of continuous professional development (CPD) is to give you the opportunity to update your knowledge and skills. If you are a nurse, it is also an NMC requirement that at least 35 hours of learning activity relevant to your practice is carried out over a three year period.

All qualified nurses must keep a portfolio which is updated on a regular basis, and at least every time a new learning activity has taken place. This learning activity can range from a face to face update or study day, an online educational activity, or attending a conference or study day that is particularly relevant to your area of practice. Learning events organised by the QNI, Faculty of Homeless and Inclusion Health, the Royal College of Nursing or Homeless Link may be especially relevant.

It is important to reflect upon your portfolio of learning courses and resources, to think about your learning at a deeper level. It is recommended that a reflective account is written following each study day or learning event that you attend. Remember you will be required to include five reflections on practice that you have discussed with a NMC registrant as a requirement of revalidation.

You can develop your professional skills and knowledge and continue your further education in many ways. If you want to work in more specialist areas, attending study days, conferences and learning events can help you to meet like-minded people and motivate you to continue pursuing your goals. These events will give you the opportunity to network and make links with healthcare professionals and others that care for people experiencing homelessness. You will have opportunities to learn about best practice, policy and legislative changes and gain peer support and

'Spending time on a placement with a homeless service will help you to gain some understanding of the causes of homelessness.'

further resource materials. There may be study events that cover areas such as foot health, dental health, end of life care for the homeless, health screening assessment skills, tissue viability, the management of long term conditions in the homeless such as chronic obstructive airways disease, diabetes, liver disease, epilepsy, blood borne viruses, tuberculosis, drug and alcohol, dual diagnosis, sexual health, nutrition, mental capacity and safeguarding.

Spending time volunteering or on placement with a homeless service such as a day centre or health provider will help you to gain some understanding of the causes of homelessness and is recommended, as they can offer more practical hands-on experience and personal insight than a study day.

Specific events and study days are often aimed at different cohorts of groups experiencing multiple forms of exclusion in society, such as homeless families, sofa surfers, squatters, rough sleepers, refugee and asylum seekers. Materials and resources are varied and you can find useful links to further information at the end of the chapter.

Standards required of a homeless health nurse

The Standards for Specialist Education and Practice¹ document is relevant for nurses who exercise higher levels of judgment, and clinical decision making in their clinical care. The purpose of these standards is to enable improvement of standards of advanced care through supervision of practice, clinical audit, research and teaching, and skilled professional leadership².

Additional [Standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nurses](#) were published in 2004 and updated to reflect the NMC Code (2015) in 2015.

As you develop your clinical skills, and specialist knowledge, due to the complex nature of your role, this will allow you to fulfil the role of an advanced nurse practitioner.

This advanced level of practice is normally at a master's degree level. It will require skills and competencies to be maintained in accordance with NMC revalidation requirements and the nursing code of professional practice. At this advanced level of practice a nurse will often have a recordable qualification in nurse prescribing either as:

- Community practitioner nurse prescriber
- Community practitioner nurse prescriber (without SPQ or SCPHN)
- Nurse independent prescriber (extended formulary)
- Nurse independent/supplementary prescriber

Completing professional development and maintaining competencies in prescribing will be the responsibility of the nurse in line with local and national guidance.

Higher education institutions and organisations such as the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) also offer a variety of validated specialist modules and advanced practice pathways suitable for the homeless and inclusion health advanced nurse practitioners and community nurses. These include:

- the management of drugs and alcohol in primary care
- substance misuse and dual diagnosis
- Mental health including mental capacity
- psychological therapies
- specialist public health
- medicines management
- sexual and reproductive health
- palliative and EOL (end of life) care

In addition the management of long-term conditions including respiratory conditions, epilepsy, diabetes, cardiovascular and liver disease are available as validated and specialist modules of study at postgraduate



degree and master's degree level. To further your study, you should access local and regional higher education institutions to see the portfolio of courses offered in your area, and if it meets the requirements of your specific professional development needs and role. Many NHS trusts have links to higher educational establishments for courses.

Learning from experienced homeless health nurses about how they developed through their careers and the journeys they took is a valuable lesson. The QNI's Homeless Health Network has over 1500 members, many of whom are nurses willing to share their experiences with people new to their field. If you want to be linked up with a nurse in the field, please contact mail@qni.org.uk.

Leadership skills

A nurse working in the field of homeless and inclusion health will need to be a strong leader and advocate for high quality patient care for those most marginalised in our communities. This makes them well suited to formal leadership roles in the future. Though not specific to homeless and inclusion health, the [NHS leadership academy](#) offers a variety of online and face to face educational programmes that may be suitable. You need the leadership skills of compassion, political awareness and networking to advocate effectively for your patients.

It may be useful to make contact with [Heath Education England](#) for further information about local courses and funding opportunities for university based modules, whether you are working for an NHS trust, in primary care or a third sector organisation.

Nurses working in homeless and inclusion health care settings also need to be able to make more autonomous decisions than their hospital based colleagues³. When you start your role, you are advised to identify key mentors who can support your learning and development, such as an experienced colleague or manager.

Supporting others

Part of your professional role as a nurse is to share your skills and knowledge to support your colleagues in their development. You may offer opportunities for student nurses to have placements to gain insight and understanding of the role. The NMC has standards to support learning and assessment in practice. Undertaking a recognised mentorship course will prepare you to work as a supervisor or mentor in practice.

Working within your own scope of practice

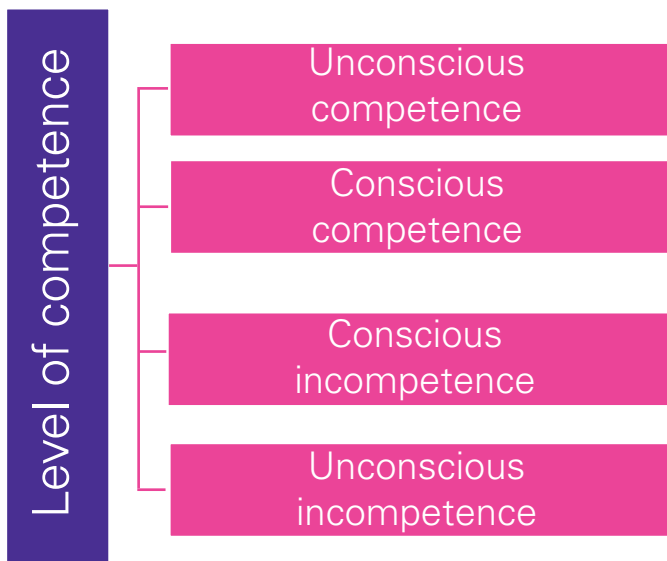
In all nursing, it is essential for you to know what your level of knowledge is, to ensure you are working within your competence at all times. This ensures that you are protected and that the care you provide is safe and effective.

‘A nurse working in [this field] will need to be a strong leader and advocate for high quality patient care for those most marginalised.’



Activity 8.1

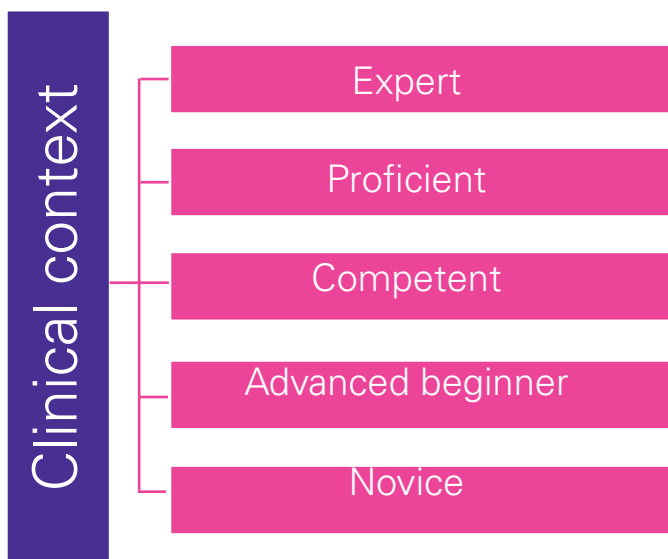
- Look at the diagram below and read the description below. Where would you place yourself on the ladder of competence?



- Unconscious Incompetence – You don't know that you don't know
- Conscious Incompetence – You know that you don't know
- Conscious Competence – You know that you know
- Unconscious Competence – You don't know that you know, it just seems easy!

Using this ladder as a tool will assist you in identifying where more learning needs to take place, but it also helps you reflect on your areas of competence.

Figure 8.1 – Benner's Model – Ranking your competence⁴



Benner's model describes how nurses pass through five levels of proficiency, as they develop a new skill: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. This model may help you and your mentor to identify those areas of skill and knowledge requiring further development.



Activity 8.2

- Having identified where you are on the ladder for a particular skill, what action are you going to take to improve your position on the ladder?

Creating your own Personal Development Plan

Creating a personal development plan will help you to reflect on your career, and focus on the actions needed to reach your goals. There are five key stages involved when creating a personal development plan:

1. Identify your current needs - what is required of your current role?
2. Analyse yourself - Carry out a SWOT analysis – look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that have assisted/prevented you working effectively in your current role and also when considering future roles
3. Develop a plan - Create a SMART action plan to assist you to move forward in the direction of your chosen career
4. Consider alternatives - Have you considered any other community, specialist, public health career paths you may want to follow? This could include Specialist Nurse, Community Matron, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Consultant nurse, management and leadership roles, education roles or commissioning roles.
5. Take action - What steps / actions do you need to take to follow your chosen career pathway?

This personal development plan will pave the way for you when you attend interviews, and will assist you when writing your CV.

Also acknowledge that you may be at different levels of competence depending on what skill or subject matter is being addressed.

You may find the exercise uncomfortable because it displays areas where you possibly thought you were more competent than you actually are. This is not a problem as long as you are aware of this and demonstrate an emotional intelligence that is resilient and will assist you to develop / strengthen in these areas.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, in yourself and in others. Having recognised this it then enables you to identify strategies that will help you to reflectively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth⁵.

Mind Tools introduces you to a number of leadership and management strategies in areas such as creativity, decision-making, strategy and communication. These tools may help you if you want to take your management skills further. It is important to remember that every nurse is a leader and will have some leadership role to play in the contribution towards excellent patient care.

‘Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, in yourself and in others.’

Figure 8.2 - An example Personal Development Plan⁶

| | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Plan goals | | |
| Specific objectives | Outcome you are looking for | Timescale (be realistic, need to do in stages?) |
| Key Actions (Things you need to do to achieve my objectives) | | |
| Support Required (The help you will need along the way) | | |
| What progress have you made and which goals have you achieved? | | |

Exploring your career options

The [health careers](#) website will highlight the various nursing opportunities that are available. Whether it be working as a member of a primary care team, working as part of a social enterprise or working with a specialist team of health workers, you will know what your options are, even if you have been in practice a while. The [Faculty of Homeless and Inclusion Health](#) provides information on career opportunities; members receive regular briefings of job opportunities. Other organisations with job postings include:

- [NHS Jobs](#)
- [Homeless Link](#) – a national umbrella body for homelessness organisations

Applying for jobs

Applying for jobs can seem daunting at times but good research, persistence, knowing and demonstrating your skills to the best can help you succeed. The following are some tips to help you through the job application process. They may be particularly useful, if you are at the early stages of your career.

1. Find out background information about organisations you are interested in working for (NHS, commissioning organisations, local authorities, private sector companies, social enterprises or charities) by visiting their website
2. Find out what their vision and strategy for the future is.
3. What skill set are they looking for – do you have the skills they are looking for? To get an idea, look through the job description, and the essential skills and desirable skills required of the position that you are applying for.
4. Ensure that the CV meets the criteria in the job description.
5. Be as succinct as possible when you answer questions on the application form.
6. If invited for an interview, have a practice interview with someone with an understanding of the role you are applying for.
7. Stay up to date with government policies that may impact on your practice.
8. Be enthusiastic and remember to let the interview panel know what specific skills you will be bringing to the role.
9. If you are asked to present at interview, you may wish to prepare a PowerPoint presentation. Keep the number of slides to a minimum (not more than 10 slides) and only write headers or bullet points.
10. Remember to speak clearly and confidently at interview and when presenting.
11. Remember that sometimes an appropriate illustration may be more suitable to include than simply words. Your portfolio is your opportunity to showcase your personal development and learning to date in your



career; make sure it is available for the interview. The information in your portfolio may be the information that helps recruiters make a decision as to which candidate they should choose

12. If unsuccessful take the feedback to improve for the next time and try to keep it in perspective. There are lots of great opportunities for your skills and passions.



Activity 8.3

- Now that you have completed this on line resource what do you plan to do to develop your career?



Summary

In this chapter, you have learned about the importance of recognising your own competence in the role you are currently working in, and being honest about what weaknesses or gaps in knowledge you still need to address. Improvement can only happen if you are self-aware and prepared to act to develop your strengths and weaknesses.

Endnote

Congratulations on working your way through this resource, and we wish you all the best in your career in homeless health nursing. If you want to join the QNI Homeless Health Network, get in touch or offer feedback on the resource please contact mail@qni.org.uk.

Further learning resources

- **NMC Revalidation**

More information about the crucial practice for nurses of [Nursing and Midwifery Council revalidation](#)

- **Transition to District Nursing Practice**

The QNI offers [Transition to District Nursing learning resource](#) as part of this series of online resources.

- **Skills and Knowledge Framework**

The London Network of Nurses and Midwives Homelessness Group, looked at the skills and knowledge required of a homeless health nurse. They developed a [skills and knowledge framework](#) which is helpful for you to print in your portfolio and refer to. It can help identify areas where you may need to develop core learning, areas you may want to develop further learning, and skills that you need.

References

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‘Applying for jobs can seem daunting at times but good research, persistence, demonstrating your skills to the best can help you succeed.’

5. Mayer J, Sluyter D, 1997, *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*.

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