

Transcript: Career Options with a Health and Social Care Degree

Concrete job titles and future options

Welcome back. So we've looked at some of the skills you have and want to use and your other potential criteria. So you can imagine yourself now in the supermarket looking through the range of options for your meal this evening. And how would you go about researching what the kind of career options, what the kind of jobs are, now you know what skills there are.

So this, I'm thinking, would be the topic for another podcast on creative job search. But briefly, you can be looking through the jobs on the NHS job website, searching say within 20 miles; getting a sense of which skills they are asking for. But obviously you may well, and most likely, you may be wanting to work with children and young people, in social care, with a whole range of other sectors.

So you don't just let your job search be guided by the NHS jobs website because that's an easy one. So you'd be asking for information interviews with practitioners in organisations and sectors which interest you. You could be tearing interesting roles out of the paper, even if they feel quite a long way beyond where you are at the moment. You could be following interesting employers local to you on Twitter. But again, that's a topic for another podcast. But just to say there isn't any one way. And you might find it helpful to keep a scrapbook, just to keep note of the issues that are coming up and the skills and how they're changing.

So: you know you're keen to use these skills, you have this experience, you've got a sense of the kind of situations you thrive in, and where you flourish, and where you're a safe pair of hands, and where you're keen to develop your expertise.

So these are some of the jobs on one day that I found by doing a bit of web searching. For example, as a Family Practitioner in a children's centre. And this would be recording the evidence of impact on children and families, of involvement with the children's centre. And the person would be doing this by interviewing clients, by gathering case studies, by recording and analysing data. So building very centrally on your communication skills and research skills that you've been developing through your degree and elsewhere.

Or for example: a Substance Misuse Recovery Adviser. So for this role they're wanting experience of work with substance misusers, which could be as a volunteer. They're wanting skills in communication, in organisation, in assistance with a therapeutic process. They're wanting someone who can manage a pressurised and diverse workload with competing demands; clearly something that most OU students are really well able to demonstrate. But again, for those of you who've got experience as care assistants – or whatever – again these are the perfect examples that you could be giving to meet that kind of criteria.

Or, for example, as a Children and Young People's Development Officer in a council. This role would be setting up partnership working, researching national priorities in this area, and researching services to young people in other councils, and making proposals for what this council would be doing. You'd be a champion on the council on development of children and young people's services.

And so what they're wanting is experience of working with young people, which could be as a volunteer, ideally experience of mentoring and project management, a track record of community engagement, which could be something like involvement with a local youth club. And planning and overseeing events, which could be something like organising a family party for a range of people or ideally something where you're liaising with other people outside, so something like setting up the stands on the school fete or whatever.

If you're interested in people with mental health difficulties, there's for example an Information, Advice and Guidance Officer helping vulnerable service users overcome boundaries to employability. So basically it would be support in applying for jobs and so on, to people with a range of support needs. And what they're wanting is someone who's got experience of providing information, advice and guidance to people with different support needs, which again could be as a volunteer.

Or for example, if you're interested in the statistics side, an NHS Trust was looking for a Workforce Intelligent Analyst, which sounds quite scary I thought but it's somebody who is good with Excel, who could extract and manage complex data about the staff across the NHS Trust and present it in appropriate formats, for example in spreadsheets or charts.

If you prefer more the communication side of things, another NHS Trust was looking for an Education Facilitator: so a trainer. And they were looking for someone with a degree, and some experience of running training, and commitment to NHS values, with good communication skills and an inclusive attitude.

I found a role as a Research Assistant on social care to older prisoners. And the role would be piloting 'Dementia Friends' in one prison:- gathering data, writing reports, and what they were wanting was a degree, experience in the voluntary sector, or in public health, or in work supporting offenders with their training which could be as a volunteer. That's possibly more complex but it's really important to say, that one was as a Research Assistant with the University of Cambridge so I think it's important to see that the experience you can be getting now can be applied in a whole range of settings that you might not have thought of.

There was one role: Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Trainee. So that would be offering high volume, low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy to clients with mild to moderate anxiety or depression. So it's a training post; so they'd be offering you training and experience in CBT techniques. And they wanted someone who's got experience of working with people who've suffered mental health difficulties – again could be as a volunteer; excellent communication skills; able to evaluate and manage your own learning; understanding of anxiety and depression; and able to work under pressure. They prefer somebody who's got a psychology or a health-related degree, and they want somebody who's worked in a service with targets in a clinical setting.

Alternatively there was a job as a Regional Dementia Adviser with the Alzheimer's Society. And that role was to develop a network of support from health and social care professionals, and to ensure that the barriers for people who find services difficult to access are actively minimised. It's about providing structured support to people with Alzheimer's and their families, helping work up information plans which meet needs, and helping individuals to navigate services. And the skills they're wanting are good organisation and time management, good communication skills, understanding of dementia, understanding of the needs of people with dementia and their carers,

experience in work with statutory organisations, knowledge of the relevant legislation, and experience of record-keeping and client confidentiality, with good IT skills.

There were also roles as Clinical Coders. NHS Trusts now only get paid for treatment if codes are correctly input, so these are really key roles. And what they're seeking is an understanding of basic anatomy, an attention to detail, IT skills, and the patience really to read through medical notes and to find the appropriate codes for the treatment that individual patients had. There's an initial training phase, and a shortage of staff who've actually been through the training. So again for the right person it could be something to consider.

Or, you could be interested in roles as a team leader in your current role, in management roles, or in the whole range of other options with further training. And I just want to say really clearly this isn't at all a comprehensive list, but I just wanted to give a flavour of how your skills could be combined in back office roles, in management roles, in development roles, and all of these were roles without needing further training which of course might be one of your criteria that you might actually be very interested in exploring further training to get you into a slightly different field.

As we looked through some of these person specifications and the experience sought, I hope it's a bit clearer why careers advisers often talk about the value of volunteering. It's not because as students sometimes hear, it's because we think the individual is, quote, "not good enough to be paid" and of course there's loads of value to volunteering for the people that one's working with, beyond the value to oneself.

But in careers terms as well, from my perspective, it's because something like as short as two hours a week volunteering can give us the chance to get experience with very different groups of clients, for example with offenders or people with dementia, or young people, or with the criminal justice system. And it also can get us far more senior experience than we get in our day job, which can help us make the case to leap-frog several levels in our career path; to tell a great story; to demonstrate values and commitment; can help us create networks; be in pole position to hear about paid opportunities in that field.

This can really help show a sense of, ok, if you fast-forward, this is what I could do, this is what you might expect that I would be able to do a few years down the line in this role. So concretely, for example, as a school governor you could be – or you would be – involved in strategic decision making, in devising policies, potentially later on in chairing meetings, definitely in supporting senior staff as they go around the challenges of running a major institution for the local community.

As a youth club volunteer you would probably be getting experience for example in talking down distressed teenagers who are on the point of kicking off. And then you'd have a range of examples about how you went about that, to show your communication skills and the range of contexts where you feel confident.

And I'm aware I've touched very little on probation and criminal justice, but for example if that's one of the areas you're interested in, or in mental health issues, you could be interested in volunteer work as an Independent Custody volunteer. They check on conditions in police stations, and in custody for detainees at times when it's unexpected that they do spot checks. So it could be something that you do late at night on a Saturday night or 7 o'clock in the morning on a Monday

morning. It could fit around your other commitments. But very, very good experience; very useful for those who are interested in youth justice, in mental health, in human rights, in youth offending and probation.

So those are some of the options that you could consider for now, but I also wanted to fast-forward ahead as well, depending on the level of your experience, what one might consider as a next job and for example some of the jobs I came up with that I thought people could be interested in.

There was a Carers' Lead in a hospital to liaise with carers and to develop policies that were more supportive to carers, that was paying £30,000 to £40,000. A Policy and Campaigns Manger in the Alzheimer's Society paying £30,000 to £35,000. A Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst with Whizzkids the disability charity, showing the impact of the interventions that they make to demonstrate that it's worth them doing it. And that was paying £33,000 to £37,000. A manager in dementia residential care. For that they wanted experience in the sector and the value set that they're wanting, but they didn't want a clinical qualification because they have other people who have those clinical qualifications, and that was paying £41,000 to £43,000.

And I thought it was really important – I spoke with Barchester Care Homes before I researched this podcast, and they said that 70% of their managers of care homes have got non-clinical qualifications; so they've got experience in the sector, they've got care experience, they've got the right values, they've got some commercial expertise, but actually what Barchester do is they hire a Registered Nurse as the Deputy Manager, leaving it free for their managers to have worked in the sector but not to have the clinical qualification. So that, over time, that could be something that you could be interested in exploring as well.

So I'm aware, that was an awful lot of me talking. I do hope you paused it at regular intervals to go off and make a cup of tea. What I'd really like to urge you, just before you move on to the rest of your life, is to write down one or two action points that you're wanting to commit to yourself that you might act on in the next week or so.

It makes a massive difference just to commit to yourself: OK I'm going to do one or two things to action my career in this area: this is one or two take-aways that I want to commit to myself, that I'm going to work on. And to write it in your diary or somewhere; don't just have a stray post-it note that hangs around in the bottom of your handbag! Write it down somewhere. And if one of those action points could be to feed back to me how this was pitched for you, how this worked for you, and ideally, what other topics that I've touched on you think might be of interest for the next podcast.

Thanks a lot, hope this was of use and really look forward to working with you. As is often the case with career guidance, it's probably opened a whole range of cans of worms, and so if you're wanting to explore things further – for example, what might be involved in different roles, what kinds of roles there are out there, the qualification learning outcomes that I mentioned earlier – I will put some resources with this podcast.

And the Open University Careers website is very interactive. There's a whole range of video segments around lots of these issues. When you've done some research just to remind you of the

possibility for a careers interview by phone or by Skype with any of the Open University careers advisers, free. So thanks a lot for your time and hope to be back in contact with you soon! 'Bye.