

Careers in health visiting

NHS

Careers

Join the team and
make a difference







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Foreword

A career in health visiting offers the opportunity to work in an environment that is interesting, rewarding and challenging. Health visitors are specially trained public health nurses who play a crucial role in the healthcare team. As a health visitor you work in the community to improve the health and well-being of families and children.

To train as a health visitor, you need to be a nurse or midwife. Some nurses and midwives train immediately after qualifying while others wait until they've gained some experience.

There are few professions that offer the job satisfaction you get from health visiting. So, if you've got an interest in improving public health and helping children get off to the best possible start, you'll find health visiting an incredibly rewarding career.

Being a health visitor

Health visitors are specially trained public health nurses working in the community to design and deliver care for families and communities. It is a diverse and satisfying role that involves building relationships with families. It suits nurses and midwives with an interest in health promotion, public health and working in the community.

A growing body of evidence – from neuroscience to public health – underlines the importance of good healthcare in the first few years of a person's life. Therefore, as lead healthcare professionals in preventing illness and improving the health of families and young children, the essential role of health visitors is now recognised more than ever.

It is also an exciting time to become a health visitor. A new service model for the profession was developed in 2010, recognising their specialist skills and giving health visitors a more central role and greater responsibility for improving family and public health.



What do health visitors do?

Health visitors ensure all families have access to a range of services that are proven to help them stay healthy. These services make up the Healthy Child Programme – the public health programme that lies at the heart of health services for children and families. Health visitors are also responsible for making sure that services are available locally so spend a lot of time working with other healthcare professionals, agencies and voluntary organisations.

Health visitors work closely with midwives and are informed of all new births so that the important early contact can be made. They also take referrals from GPs or social workers. They run child health clinics where they provide health advice, health promotion, or talk about immunisation, nutrition, obesity and other issues relating to child health.

Under the new health visiting model, health visiting teams offer four levels of service to families with children under five. Every family will receive the universal service, making sure that the Healthy Child Programme is available to all. Some families will need health visiting care packages for specific issues or over longer periods of time. Health visitors will decide with the family what services are needed. For more information on the four levels of service, visit

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/hvmodel



Types of care that health visitors provide:

- antenatal visits
- parenting support
- advice on family health and minor illness
- new birth visits which include advice on diet, feeding, weaning and health checks
- leading the Healthy Child Programme, including providing immunisation and undertaking physical and developmental checks
- offering information and support for families on issues such as feeding, dental health, keeping safe, speech language and communication
- participating in safeguarding meetings to discuss complex cases
- providing specific support on subjects like postnatal depression, or supporting families with complex needs
- working with Sure Start children's centre teams and other agencies.

CASE STUDY

**Katie Maltby, health visitor,
Cambridgeshire Community
Services NHS Trust**

Katie's ambition was to become a midwife. However, a placement with a health visiting team while studying for her nursing diploma took her career in a new direction.

"Spending two weeks with a health visiting team as a student nurse completely changed my mind. From that moment, I knew that I wanted to be a health visitor. I wanted the chance to work with children and families and midwifery focuses more on the pregnancy and labour. I was also a nursery nurse before starting my nursing training and I could see how this experience would help as a health visitor.

"I qualified in 2009 and started work in Cambridge. I recently changed jobs, which means I am still getting to know my families, but it is clear that I am working in a very deprived area. This means some very different challenges, such as working with families with children on the child protection register. I also work with victims of domestic violence. This means supporting these mums while they make the



tough decision about their future. Research has shown that women are at increased risk when they decide to leave a violent partner, so my aim is to make sure they do this as safely as possible and with the right support.

"If you are thinking about health visiting as a career, don't expect the training to be an easy ride. It's hard work but the rewards after qualifying are enormous. Building therapeutic relationships with my clients and feeling that I'm making a real difference to their lives is incredibly satisfying. I would recommend it to anyone."

What makes a good health visitor?

Being a health visitor is a demanding job but gives a lot of satisfaction in return. A good health visitor has numerous skills and attributes. For example, you will need to be able to:

- interact and build collaborative, strong relationships with families
- be a good listener, approachable and non-judgemental
- make sure decisions and recommendations are evidence-based where possible
- analyse information, even where complex or conflicting
- be sensitive to differences in backgrounds, culture and circumstances, and tailor your approach accordingly
- have a desire to work with communities to make positive changes
- build networks with a range of partner organisations and agencies
- work in a team and have strong leadership skills
- recognise the scope and limit of your knowledge and when to get support from others
- understand the important role you play in promoting a healthy lifestyle



through prevention and reducing health inequalities

- be results-driven and want to make a difference
- take responsibility for your work and manage your time and workload
- effectively lead, delegate and coordinate others while recognising where you are responsible.

The value of health visiting

Problems in early life can affect a person's mental and physical health in later life. However, by building strong relationships with families and providing ongoing care and support, health visitors help avoid problems and contribute to better health for individuals and the public in general.

The interventions, advice and support that health visitors offer on subjects such as breastfeeding and obesity can really benefit a child's development beyond the first five years of life.

Many families will also testify that the additional support from health visitors contributes in even greater ways, such as to the neurological, linguistic and physical development of children.

Health visitors support parents in their physical, emotional and mental health and they also teach good parenting skills, helping parents to provide a stable and caring environment for their children.

Many parents find this help invaluable as they adjust to life following the birth of their child.



Where do health visitors work?

Health visitors see parents and families in a variety of settings, including:

- their homes
- clinics
- Sure Start children's centres.

They also spend a lot of time working with other agencies and early years professionals who share a common commitment to children's development. These include:

- GPs
- other healthcare professionals, such as speech and language therapists, nurses and occupational therapists
- voluntary agencies.

CASE STUDY

**Richard Montague, health visitor,
Sandwell and West Birmingham
Hospitals NHS Trust**

A chance meeting with an ex-colleague who was studying towards a health visiting qualification inspired Richard to find out more about the role. Since qualifying as a health visitor in 1995, he hasn't looked back.

"He was one of only a few men on a health visiting course and his passion for the role really inspired me. I was working as a psychiatric nurse and ward manager so I did some work experience with a health visiting team to see what it was like. After this, I knew it was the career for me.

"Health visiting is a complex but rewarding career which is vital to the health service. It is a wide-ranging role that involves a variety of tasks, such as new birth visits, protecting and safeguarding vulnerable children and educating new parents on issues such as breastfeeding and oral health. I am one of the very few male health visitors in the area so I also offer specialist support to fathers and promote fathers as positive role models in a child's upbringing.

"I get to work with a variety of people, including other highly skilled and



motivated healthcare professionals and agencies. The nature of my role means I might need to refer a mother with post-natal depression to a psychiatric counselling service for example, or a child with a learning disability to an early years' centre providing specialist services and support.

"Where I work is very deprived so I deal with many families from poor socio-economic backgrounds who often feel vulnerable and isolated. By assessing their health needs, I can provide advice on accessing various services within the community or signpost them to specialist workers.

"Lots of people dread going to work but I can honestly say that I love my job. The positive contribution I make to a family's physical and emotional wellbeing is really satisfying, particularly when they need that extra support they wouldn't receive without us."

Entry requirements and training

In order to train as a health visitor, you must already be a qualified registered nurse or midwife. You will need to take an approved programme in specialist community public health nursing/health visiting (SCPHN/HV).

The requirements for entry to SCPHN/HV programmes are very flexible and no minimum period of post-registration experience is required. Any registered nurse or midwife is eligible to apply, and you can enter the programme at any stage as long as you can demonstrate that you are able to study at the required educational level.

Training

Programmes are at degree level and are normally a minimum of one year full time or the part-time equivalent. Higher education institutions (HEIs) provide training across the country, on behalf of the NHS.

A full-time course comprises 52 weeks of study, of which 45 weeks is spent in education and clinical practice, and must be completed within 78 weeks. Part-time courses must be completed within 156 weeks.

Where an applicant has relevant experience and/or learning, the HEI that provides the health visiting course may give accreditation of prior learning (APL). This can be applied up to a



maximum of one-third of a SCPHN/HV programme.

Some HEIs offer '2+1' programmes, where a graduate with a health-related degree can obtain APL and complete their pre-registration nurse training in two (rather than three) years, then follow this with the one year full-time SCPHN/HV programme.

If you are already working as a nurse or midwife, your current employer may be able to second you onto a training programme, although some students may fund themselves.

Your health visiting career

Career progression and specialisation

Health visiting is a specialist branch of nursing, with a focus on community public health. There are opportunities to progress your career in and beyond health visiting. You'll be able to develop further specialties and you can progress up the career ladder.

The experience, leadership and management skills you will acquire as a practising health visitor can lead to team manager positions or specialist roles, as well as a wider range of careers across healthcare.

Health visitor team leaders often work with families every day, but also have the extra responsibility of managing and providing clinical supervision to health visiting teams, which may include community staff nurses and health visiting assistants.

There are opportunities for health visitors to specialise in working with specific parts of the community such as asylum seekers, domestic violence cases and the travelling community. Often, it is the health visitor's own skills, experience and interests that lead to this sort of specialism.

There may also be opportunities to move into nurse consulting, education, research or general management roles. Some health visitors also progress into health visitor consultant roles, other public health roles, or into strategic roles within healthcare or education.

The NHS career planner for nurses contains information about different types of jobs and includes case studies from nurses working in those roles. You will also find links to other tools and resources, designed to help guide you in your career choices.

For more information, visit nursingcareers.nhsemployers.org



CASE STUDY**Inge Nickell, health visitor and infant mental health lead, NHS Devon**

Inge was a staff nurse on a gynaecology ward when she decided to train to as a health visitor. She was keen to further her nursing career in a challenging and rewarding area. Inge is now the only infant mental health specialist for health visiting in North Devon.

“After completing a master’s degree in infant mental health, I was seconded to the children’s centre in Barnstaple, where I set up a child mental health service, supporting families to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of infants and their parents. When my secondment ended, I returned to my previous post, but continued to lead in this field.

“Part of my role is working with parents who may be struggling to understand their baby, or mothers who have difficulties bonding with their baby. These families are referred to me by health visiting colleagues for a Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Scale (NBAS). NBAS is an interactive assessment carried out on babies from birth to eight weeks. By looking at a baby’s response to light, sound, faces



and objects as well as physical activities/reflexes, I am able to highlight a baby’s behaviour, their likes and dislikes, strengths and difficulties, and share these with the parents.

“Not only does this show parents how amazing their babies are, it helps them understand their temperament and develop appropriate ways to care for them. The experience of working with these babies and sharing what you see with parents is amazing. NBAS is not the only thing I do. I also run a variety of parenting groups and offer one-to-one support to mothers.

“Child mental health is just one of the many specialist fields and career opportunities available in health visiting. Whichever you choose, it is a fascinating career where you get to be creative, use different skills and knowledge and learn new things every day.”

Working in the NHS

Few careers are as rewarding, or give you the opportunity to work with such a wide variety of people, as a career in the NHS.

The NHS recruits health visitors of all ages, backgrounds and levels of experience. This helps us understand the different needs of the communities we help every day and provide the best possible service. Wherever you work, you will become part of a talented, passionate team of people – committed to providing the best care and treatment to patients.

Most health visitors work in the NHS. However, some are employed by local authorities and social enterprises that have different terms and conditions of employment. The information in this section only applies to health visitors employed by the NHS.

Benefits of working in the NHS

Everyone who joins the NHS is guaranteed a salary that matches their ability and responsibilities, and is given every opportunity to increase it through training and development.

PAY AND CONDITIONS

The NHS pay system, known as Agenda for Change, offers real benefits for all directly employed staff. It covers everyone except doctors, dentists and very senior managers and includes:

- 37.5 hour standard working week
- holiday entitlement of 27 days a year, plus eight general and public holidays, rising to 33 days after ten years of service
- pay enhancements to reward out-of-hours, shift and overtime working

- better career and pay progression based on the application of knowledge and skills
- annual personal development reviews to support career aspirations.

Health visitors in the NHS usually work at Agenda for Change bands 6 and 7, depending on experience.

To see the most up-to-date starting salaries for the Agenda for Change pay bands, go to

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/payrates

Working full time, you will receive at least 27 days' holiday each year, plus a range of other benefits, including occupational health and counselling services.

NHS staff are covered by the NHS Pension Scheme. Every new employee automatically becomes a member of the scheme and you will get a package of pension benefits that is fully protected against inflation and guaranteed by the Government.

Helping you find the right work-life balance

The NHS is committed to maintaining a healthy work-life balance for all NHS staff. There is real focus on specific areas that are designed to make your life easier at certain times during your career.



FULFIL YOUR POTENTIAL

- The NHS is committed to offering development and learning opportunities for all full-time and part-time staff.
- No matter where you start within the NHS, you'll have access to training and be given every chance to progress within the organisation.
- You will receive an annual personal review and development plan to support your career progression.
- You will be encouraged to extend your range of skills and knowledge and take on new responsibilities through the Knowledge and Skills Framework.

These include:

- flexible working and flexible retirement
- childcare provision and support for carers in the workplace
- creating a healthier work environment
- training and development
- tackling discrimination, bullying and harassment.

You can find more information on health and well-being at work at

www.nhsemployers.org/healthyworkplaces

Manage your commitments in and out of work

The size and diversity of the NHS means we can offer you a range of flexible

working opportunities. Part-time roles and job-share opportunities are often available, as well as term-time only, evening and weekend positions.

We will do everything we can to help you combine your work for us with commitments in your everyday life – whether you're studying for a new qualification, raising a family or have other responsibilities.

As well as advice and support for people looking after sick or elderly relatives, you will also have access to a range of childcare services, including:

- nursery care
- after-school and breakfast clubs
- holiday play schemes
- emergency care.



CASE STUDY

**Rifat Qureshi, health visitor,
Bradford District Care Trust**

Rifat has enjoyed a varied career in the NHS working as both a nurse and midwife. She has taught healthcare law and ethics while working overseas and is now working as a health visitor in Yorkshire.

“As part of my initial nursing training, I completed a placement with a health visiting team which I really enjoyed. However, it wasn’t until 2004, after returning from a career break in Jordan, that I began my health visiting training.

“Every day is very different. I am lucky enough to be working with families from a variety of backgrounds which is challenging and rewarding. For example, one visit may involve visiting a home where a family are taking their first steps into parenthood. This can be a very daunting experience for some parents and they welcome all the support they can get. Inter-agency working and collaboration are often necessary, especially when working with vulnerable families, so it is a crucial part of the health visitor’s role. The next visit could be providing advice and support to a mother with post-natal depression.



“Unlike what some people believe, health visiting en–role is not all about weighing babies but also involves working with children and families at different stages in their lives. I run a clinic where I undertake developmental reviews for children up to school age. It is really important that a child is developing well and is ready for school by the age of five.

“I have completed two Master’s degrees – one in biotechnology, law and ethics and the second in health visiting, which have allowed me to spend one day a week lecturing healthcare law and ethics to midwifery students at Bradford University as part of a secondment opportunity supported my manager.

“Health visiting is such a rewarding career. It means I am able to make becoming a parent a little bit easier while giving children the best possible start in life.”

What's your next step?



We hope this booklet will have given you some idea of what a career in health visiting will involve.

If you have decided that you want to become a health visitor, your next step depends on your starting point. NHS Careers can provide further information on how to apply for training.

If you are considering a change of career, volunteering or shadowing an established professional in your spare time is a useful way to find out more

about the field of work that you wish to pursue and can be invaluable in terms of making contacts.

Whatever position you're in right now, NHS Careers can help. For more information, please call **0300 123 1023** or visit **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/healthvisiting**

To search for health visiting jobs in the NHS, go to **www.jobs.nhs.uk** and for a list of useful links, visit **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/hvlinks**



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HV09 Nov 2011

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