

Clinical support worker

Join the team and
make a difference

As a **clinical support worker**, also known as **healthcare assistant**, you'll provide vital assistance to healthcare professionals in diagnosing, treating and caring for patients. In some cases, you'll also be involved in looking after the general well-being and comfort of patients. These are all responsible and

rewarding roles with a direct impact on patients' lives. They also offer an ideal entry route to many NHS careers for people with commitment and enthusiasm rather than academic qualifications. This factsheet will give you an idea of these excellent opportunities to join the NHS.

What will you do?

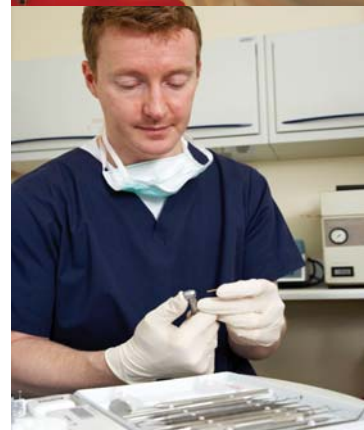
• Allied health professions

Assistants in the allied health professions will usually work normal office hours, with part-time and flexi-working often available. In some roles, such as assistant dietitians and radiographers, some weekend and shift work may be involved.

As an **arts therapy assistant**, you will use art, music or drama to support adults and children with learning difficulties or mental health problems. It's increasingly recognised that the arts have an important therapeutic role, for example in helping people to communicate and to express themselves through art, music, drama or dance. People can also gain greater self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem, as well as simply taking part in an activity with others that gives them great pleasure and satisfaction. Arts therapy assistants usually work with groups of clients, perhaps alongside the qualified therapist or on their own. You will help to set up the activities, encourage and help clients to participate and perhaps record their achievements and progress.

Assistant dietitians work alongside a registered dietitian. In hospital you will ensure that patients are well nourished and on the right diet for their condition. You might advise those on special diets about choosing suitable meals from the hospital menu, for example, and liaise with nurses about patients' weight and food intake. In the community you might help educate the local population about healthy eating. You could be working with patients on strict food regimes, such as those with kidney disease, food allergies, eating disorders, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, cancer or digestive problems.

Occupational therapy assistants help to support clients with physical, mental or social problems to cope with daily activities. Here you will play a vital part in helping many people to lead independent lives in their own homes. Once the occupational therapist (OT) has assessed a client's needs, you will help that individual to achieve goals, such as going shopping or preparing a simple meal. You will support and encourage clients and report back on their progress, liaising with the OT and possibly also with nursing staff and social services. You'll also make sure the clients have all the special aids they need and that the equipment is in good working order.



Physiotherapy assistants help registered physiotherapists to rehabilitate patients with an illness or disability, or after an injury. Your patients could be of any age – babies, sports players or elderly people who have had a stroke. You will help the patient to follow the exercise and treatment programme set out by the physiotherapist. This could involve showing them how to use mobility aids, setting up equipment and working on exercises with them. You might also keep records and write short progress reports.

As a **podiatry assistant**, also known as a chiropody or foot-care assistant, you will be responsible for giving the more routine foot care and treatment under the supervision of a registered podiatrist. Your work will include cutting toenails and applying dressings. The patients will include elderly people, those with foot injuries, those having nail surgery or laser treatment and people with diabetes who are prone to circulation or sensation problems in their feet. You might also do some clerical work, such as booking appointments.

Radiography assistants are sometimes also known as imaging support workers. In this role you will be at the cutting edge of medicine, working with state-of-the-art technology alongside registered radiographers. You could be involved in diagnosis, helping to investigate a wide range of illnesses and injuries, using techniques such as ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computer-assisted tomography (CAT scans) as well as X-rays. You could work in therapeutic radiography or in radiotherapy, where you'll help to treat patients with certain types of cancer. You might collect patients from the ward or department, prepare them for the procedure, and make sure equipment is properly maintained.

As a **speech and language therapy assistant** you will help a registered speech and language therapist to treat patients with a range of speech and language difficulties, including problems with producing and using words and with understanding language. Speech and language therapists also help people with feeding, chewing and swallowing.

You could work with many different types of patient, including children, adults with physical disabilities or

mental health problems and people recovering from conditions such as a stroke. You might see people on a one-to-one basis; at other times you might work with groups of patients who have similar problems. You'll help and encourage them to carry out speech and language exercises, record their progress and liaise with the therapist about any changes to their course of treatment, as well as prepare equipment and possibly also make appointments.

• Dentistry

As a clinical support worker in dentistry you will have a key role in helping the dental team to treat patients and provide advice. You'll work under the supervision of a dentist and/or dental nurse and you could be working with dental hygienists and dental therapists. Your job will involve mixing the materials that the dentist uses for filling teeth, assisting with X-rays and sterilising instruments and equipment. You may be on hand to pass instruments during surgery and to help patients with mouth rinsing.

You might also greet patients, reassure nervous people, make appointments, give basic advice about dental care and keep records. You will have close day-to-day contact with patients of all ages. Clinical support workers in dentistry will usually work normal office hours, with part-time and flexi-working often available. In some cases weekend work may be involved.

• Healthcare science

As a **healthcare assistant** in healthcare science you will have an exciting role helping healthcare scientists to investigate and treat disease. Healthcare assistants in healthcare science work normal office hours or shifts, include evenings and weekends, depending on their particular role and specialism. Part-time and flexi-working is often available.

As a **medical laboratory assistant** (MLA) you will have a wide range of clinical areas to choose from; you might specialise in one area or work across several. The specialisms include haematology (diseases of the blood); cytology (the structure of cells, including screening for certain cancers); and biochemistry (chemical reactions in the blood, such as those involved in kidney failure). You

The training opportunities are excellent. People from all backgrounds can have a great career in the NHS

might make up chemical solutions, label and sort tissue samples, sterilise equipment and use a computer to analyse data and keep records. In most MLA roles, you will work alongside scientists and liaise with doctors but have no contact with patients.

As a **phlebotomist** your job will be to take blood from patients who are being investigated for one of many different conditions or whose illness or treatment progress is being monitored. Working on your own but liaising with nurses, you will also label the samples and make sure they are delivered to the appropriate laboratory for analysis.

As an **assistant technical officer**, you will support qualified healthcare scientists who use complex, specialist equipment to diagnose, measure and treat a wide range of conditions, including heart and kidney disease and hearing and breathing problems. You'll help to set up and operate the machinery and ensure that it is properly maintained. You might work alongside a scientist or on your own, and you will have close contact with patients.

As a **cardiographer**, you will help doctors to make vital decisions about a patient's condition and treatment. Your job will be to operate the electrocardiograph (ECG) machines that monitor the functioning of the heart. You will fit electrodes to the patient's body, ensure that they are correctly connected to the machine, and then take readings. Working on your own, you will have contact with healthcare scientists and close contact with patients.

As a **newborn hearing screener**, you will carry out tests to check newborn babies' hearing in order to pick up any problems as soon as possible. The tests are painless for the child and simple to perform, yet can be crucial to a child's overall development. The equipment is linked to a computer that tells you if the baby needs to be referred on for further screening. You will also make

sure that the results are forwarded to the appropriate healthcare staff. You'll work on your own but as part of a team with audiologists and/or GPs and health visitors and you'll have close contact with infants and their families.

• Midwifery

Maternity support workers assist midwives in caring for women and their babies through the vital stages of pregnancy, childbirth and the first few days after the birth. In the labour ward, you might help midwives to prepare instruments and equipment ready for normal deliveries and also Caesarean procedures in theatre. In a maternity ward, you will assist with the essential care of mothers and newborns, for example with hygiene and feeding, as well as encouraging and reassuring new mothers. You might help with routine jobs such as making beds and you'll have a lot of contact with women, their partners and families.

You will usually work shifts, including nights and weekends. Part-time and flexi-working is often available.

• Nursing

As a **nursing healthcare assistant** you will have a key role in routine nursing care. For example, you might take and record temperatures and blood pressures, help patients with washing, feeding and toileting, make beds and assist people who have problems walking. One of your most important and satisfying tasks will be spending time with patients, talking to them, helping to deal with any concerns and reassuring them. With training, you could take on extra responsibilities such as taking blood samples and removing catheters.

You could be looking after any one of a wide range of patients, including those recovering from operations, elderly people, those with mental health problems or cancer patients. You'll have close constant contact with patients and their relatives. In a hospital you will work closely with nurses but in the community you might work on your own or with another assistant.

You will work a 37.5-hour week on a shift or rota system, probably including nights and weekends. Part-time and flexi-working is often available.

Role	Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
Arts therapy assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a hospital therapy department or in a community clinic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interest and ability in art, drama and/or music • creativity and imagination • a caring and encouraging attitude • good communication skills • patience
Assistant technical officer	<p>You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a hospital department • in a community clinic • in patients' homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • a reassuring manner • the ability to work efficiently and accurately • a responsible attitude • respect for patients' dignity • good communication skills • the ability to work on your own initiative and in a team • an interest in technology
Cardiographer	In a hospital cardiac department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • a reassuring manner • the ability to work efficiently and accurately • a responsible attitude • respect for patients' dignity • good communication skills • the ability to work on your own initiative and in a team • an interest in technology
Clinical support worker in dentistry	<p>You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a clinic in the community • in hospital • in patients' homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • tact and sensitivity • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • the ability to work in a team
Assistant dietitian	<p>You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in hospitals • in local clinics and health centres • in care homes • in people's own homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interest in food and how diet affects health • a caring, positive attitude to people • good communication skills • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • a responsible, professional approach
Maternity support worker	<p>You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on a hospital labour or maternity ward • in a community delivery suite • in women's own homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • an interest in mothers and small babies • good communication skills • tact and sensitivity • respect for women's dignity • initiative • the ability to work in a team
Medical laboratory assistant	<p>You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a laboratory, • on a hospital ward • in a clinic in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to work efficiently and accurately • a responsible attitude • good communication skills • the ability to work in a team. • an interest in science, particularly biology and chemistry

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Role	Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
Newborn hearing screener	In a hospital neonatal or postnatal unit or clinic, or in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • a reassuring manner • the ability to work efficiently and accurately • good communication skills • the ability to work on your own initiative and in a team • an interest in technology • basic computing skills.
Nursing healthcare assistant	You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on a hospital ward • in a hospital outpatient clinic • in a GP clinic • in patients' homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • tact and sensitivity • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • patience • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • physical fitness • initiative • the ability to work in a team.
Occupational therapy assistant	On a hospital ward or in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring and encouraging attitude • tact and sensitivity • patience • good communication skills • initiative • the ability to work in a team • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • practical skills, such as cookery, woodwork or pottery.
Phlebotomist	You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a laboratory • on a hospital ward • in a clinic in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • a reassuring manner • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • the ability to work on your own initiative and in a team • accuracy • a responsible attitude.
Physiotherapy assistant	You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on a hospital ward • in an outpatient clinic • in a community clinic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring, encouraging attitude • tact and sensitivity • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • patience • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • initiative • the ability to work in a team • an interest in anatomy.
Podiatry assistant	You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on a hospital ward • in an outpatient clinic • in a community clinic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • tact and sensitivity • the ability to relate to people of all ages and backgrounds • patience • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • initiative • the ability to work in a team • an interest in foot care.

Role	Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
Radiography assistant	In a hospital X-ray/imaging or radiotherapy department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a caring attitude • tact and sensitivity • good communication skills • respect for patients' dignity • the ability to work in a team • reassuring manner • an interest in working with high-tech equipment.
Speech and language therapy assistant	You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on a hospital ward • in an outpatient clinic • in a community clinic • in people's homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interest in anatomy, speech, and linguistics • good communication and listening skills • the confidence to relate to people of all ages • a responsible, professional approach, respecting client confidentiality.

What entry routes are available?

In all of these roles, employers look for motivation and enthusiasm and personal qualities such as a mature and caring attitude, rather than academic qualifications. However, you will need a good general education with numeracy and literacy, as most roles involve some paperwork. Any academic qualifications that you do have, for example GCSEs or an NVQ in a relevant subject, will be an advantage. You can also show your commitment and suitability if you have had relevant work experience or done voluntary work in a related area.

How can you develop your career?

The clinical support worker role is an ideal entry route to many careers. You can extend your role and gain qualifications through day-release or block-release courses while earning a salary. If you have the commitment and aptitude, you can eventually qualify as a healthcare professional, such as a nurse, speech and language therapist or audiologist.

Training for support workers is largely on the job, working under the close supervision of a qualified professional. You will probably start off on level 2 of the NHS Career Framework but can then progress to level 3, as a senior healthcare support worker, and then to level 4, by which time you may have the title of assistant practitioner or associate practitioner. All the time you will be gaining qualifications and experience and taking on more responsibility.

As a senior healthcare support worker, for example, you will probably have gained or be studying for an NVQ level 3 or equivalent. As an assistant/associate

practitioner you may be studying for a foundation degree, BTEC higher award or HND. At this level, if you are working in one of the allied health professions clinical areas such as physiotherapy or podiatry, or a healthcare science such as audiology, you may even have your own caseload of patients, giving treatments according to set guidelines.

The next step, level 5, is status as a registered healthcare professional, which sets you on a career pathway that can lead all the way to consultant status.

For more information on the Career Framework, please see the booklets entitled *Careers in the wider healthcare team*, *Careers in the allied health professions*, *Careers in healthcare science*, *Careers in nursing*, *Careers in midwifery* and *Careers in dental care*.

Pay

Your career as a healthcare support worker could be in many healthcare disciplines in the NHS. Entry-level support worker roles in the healthcare sciences, for example, could start at Agenda for Change Band 1, rising to the more advanced roles like assistant practitioner (radiography), maternity care assistant or healthcare scientist assistant at Band 4. Typically clinical support worker roles would start at Band 2, rising to Band 3 for higher-level support worker roles. For more information, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits

For more information about the wide range of exciting opportunities as a clinical support worker, visit: www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working
For current vacancies, visit: www.jobs.nhs.uk