

## From NHS nurse to lecturer: making the transition to education

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## **Making the transition from the NHS to academia – what I've learned**

As a registered nurse and educator with 14 years' experience, and in 2021 I moved to the UK to join the NHS as a theatre nurse practitioner.

I qualified as a nurse in the Philippines in 2010 and worked in a variety of healthcare settings - including the medical-surgical unit, emergency department, and community services – before moving to China to do my PhD in comparative education at Beijing Normal University.

I held posts in education and research in China and Australia before moving to the UK, where I quickly advanced to a clinical educator role. Last year I made the transition from the NHS to academia and am now a senior lecturer in adult nursing at the University of Worcester.

As a clinical educator in the NHS, I had the opportunity to support internationally educated nurses (IENs). This was a rewarding experience that involved not only teaching but delivering culturally sensitive pastoral support, cultural and workplace integration, and retention strategies.

This role taught me the importance of working collaboratively with internal and external teams to create a positive experience for IENs. The teaching sessions were to scaffold and ingrain Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and national standards which, for many students, meant unlearning cultural beliefs and dissimilar practices that do not fit with the ethos of the NHS.

However, I found that the most crucial aspect is to foster a sense of belongingness so that nurses recruited from abroad feel empowered and choose to stay and thrive in this country.

The transition from clinical educator to nursing lecturer was quite a significant shift; although I had teaching experience and transferable skills from this role, it did not fully prepare me for the challenges of teaching in an academic setting.

Teaching in a university was a departure from the more hands-on approach in the NHS, where clinical educators can demonstrate a particular set of clinical skills and then closely monitor students and new staff.

Group sizes were quite small, meaning an individualised approach could be achieved more easily. Learning is often straightforward, and revision almost instantaneous.

But as a lecturer in academia, where classes are typically bigger, students take a more active role in their own learning, with academic staff guiding and facilitating this.

There is a strong emphasis on continuous reflection and building knowledge by linking theory to practice. Using examples from my time working for the NHS in my teaching makes this more relatable for students, enhancing their understanding and increasing engagement.

One of the many things I appreciate about teaching in higher education is the feeling of autonomy. The freedom inherent in this role cultivates independence, making me more responsible and innovative.

Although there is some level of autonomy when caring for patients, collaboration and teamwork are essential in clinical practice. But in my current role, the onus is on me to create, research, deliver, and evaluate my teaching methods, pushing me to rediscover my own creativity and examine my practice as an educator.

### **[Box]: Thinking of making the move from the NHS to academia? 7 top tips**

- **Use your expertise and experience:** Use your experience in the NHS to enrich your teaching. For internationally educated nurses, remember that overseas experience is still experience and can be used to enhance understanding of nursing in different contexts
- **Invest in yourself:** Keep up to date with your continuing professional development and the latest research in your field. This will help make your teaching content relevant and dynamic.
- **Trial and error:** You won't always get it right, and that is okay. Embrace the learning process so you can refine and improve your teaching methods and practices over time
- **Look for a mentor:** Establish a relationship with an experienced mentor who can provide ongoing support and advice tailored to your transition into academia
- **Reach out:** You're not alone in this journey and can always find someone to reach out to for guidance and encouragement
- **Stay open minded:** Approach every opportunity, whether good or bad, as a chance to learn and grow
- **Practice self-compassion:** Transitioning to a new role and environment can be challenging, so it's important to be kind to yourself and take care of your well-being during this period.

As I progress in this role, I have come to realise that student assessments rely heavily on academic rigour and aptitude. Some students who excel and receive positive feedback in clinical placements may not demonstrate the same level of proficiency in academic settings, and vice versa.

Understanding this dynamic has become instrumental to supporting my students more effectively. Although this can present challenges, especially

in bridging the gap between practical skills and academic performance, it is very fulfilling when students are able to overcome these obstacles.

Navigating the balance between recognising students' individual strengths and meeting academic expectations is a pivotal aspect of my role. As well as enhancing the learning experience for students, this helps to strengthen their holistic development.

I have also made some errors or misjudgements as a nursing lecturer which have left me feeling inadequate and foolish. But taking on a new role means embracing a certain level of discomfort—being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

Being kind to myself during these moments of uncertainty has been vital; making a mistake or not knowing what to do is not reflective of your competence but rather a stepping stone to progress. The sooner I accepted this, the more I felt able to view each misstep as an opportunity to grow.

I also realised that it's okay to ask for help and support, and that cultivating a mindset of self-compassion and reaching out is essential in navigating some of the obstacles intrinsic to academia.

The transition from the NHS to academia has been a steep learning curve but also an inspiring journey, with many challenges and opportunities along the way.

Much like the students I teach, I am continually learning and evolving as I navigate through this change. While there isn't a manual or support group available to help in this transition, the knowledge, skills, and experience gained from the NHS are proving invaluable in facilitating the process.

Working as a nurse in the NHS opened up new career pathways for me and opportunities for professional development.

Undertaking the NHS England and Florence Nightingale Foundation fellowship programme opened my eyes to the lack of representation of internationally educated nurses in leadership and management roles, and in higher education and research.

This ignited my passion not only for teaching but for the chance to represent the Global Majority in a space that is not traditionally occupied by IENs like myself. This has driven me to break down barriers and trailblaze for all aspiring nurses from diverse backgrounds, with the hope of reshaping nursing discourses to reflect the rich diversity and inclusion of the global community in nursing studies.

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