

Unit Six

Career planning and development for health care assistants from a patient's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- explain where to look for information about the health care assistant (HCA) role
- explain where to go to find out more about becoming an HCA.

HCAs are an expanding proportion of the NHS workforce – working in hospital settings, the community and in general practices. If you are thinking of returning to work after spending time raising a family or are interested in having a career change, you could consider becoming an HCA. You should not let your age, background or qualifications hold you back from looking into becoming an HCA. You need to be enthusiastic about providing care to patients, and willing to learn and develop.

See [Tool - Careers support information for health care assistants](#) for more information on reference sources and details of organisations capable of providing you with information about entering a variety of NHS careers, including that of an HCA, or moving on to a registered professional qualification as a nurse or allied health professional. See [Tool - Job description for a health care assistant \(basic\)](#) to find out what the job of an HCA entails and the person specification describing the type of person that might suit the role.

You can look on the *Skills for Health* website (www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careerframework/tools.php) to review the career pathways that are available to NHS staff. If you are unsure about the career route you want to pursue, it may help to look at the website www.nhscareers.nhs.uk. This website gives you easy access to career guidance for all types of NHS career. You can also find out all about working in the NHS. You can even apply for a job online.

In many local areas, the NHS has created a career track that encourages members of the local community to consider a career as an HCA. The JobCentre Plus initiative provides support for people, helping them to find the right kind of job (see www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk). It can also help you to access career development loans, if necessary. If you need help with basic literacy and numeracy skills before you could consider becoming an HCA, take a look at the *Skills for Life* website (see www.sflqi.org.uk) to find local sources of help and advice.

PCT assistance

When you are ready to take it further, you should contact whoever leads on healthcare careers advice at your local college or Primary Care Trust (PCT). There are more HCAs working in hospitals at present compared with general practice, so you should look at the various different health settings to determine which will best suit you. Some PCTs are working with local communities to promote opportunities for various jobs in the NHS – see *Example: Developing links with communities*.

Example: Developing links with communities

Coventry Teaching PCT, the local acute hospital and Connexions joined forces to promote working with the NHS. NHS staff visited primary and secondary school children as a targeted initiative to talk about their jobs. Work placements and junior scholarships enabled teenagers to experience NHS working as part of their GCSE, A level or vocational course. Taster sessions in the NHS involve the Working in Partnership Programme's adults and older people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹

Making Sense of Health initiative is working with the DfES and the Open University, is a one-stop health resource for teachers, parents and students in primary and secondary education. One of the aims of the initiative to promote careers in healthcare by providing high-quality information.²

What next?

If you are interested in a job as an HCA in general practice, you could get in touch with your nearest PCT and see if there is a scheme to allow members of the local community to sample life as an HCA, and learn more about the role. Volunteering England has produced a booklet *Volunteers across the NHS: Improving the Patient Experience and Creating a patient-led Service*³ that gives lots of ideas what volunteers can do in the NHS and general practice. Look at the section of this Unit giving the HCA's perspective and [Unit 5: Education and training](#) for additional information. These resources will provide you with details about accessing training, and the various types of education and training relevant for HCAs or more senior nursing and allied health professional staff. Your local college will also be able to advise you as to whether you will need to gain additional literacy and numeracy skills before starting such an access course. Look at [Unit 2: The employment of health care assistants in general practice](#) to read a typical job description and person specification for an HCA so you have more of an idea what the job entails.

If you are interested in applying for a post as an HCA, see [Tool - How to complete an application form](#), which will help you with completing the application form. See [Tool - Hints and tips on compiling your CV](#) for guidance on compiling your CV to accompany your application. If you are shortlisted, see [Tool - Tips and hints for the interview](#), which relays tips and hints to help you prepare for the interview.

Summary

- HCAs have been around in the NHS for many years, they are becoming more common in general practice.
- There are opportunities to become an HCA, you will need to be willing to learn new skills and get involved in training.
- There is help available from your local PCT and on the internet to help you find out more about becoming an HCA.

References

1. Department of Health. *Skills Escalator Resource Pack: Achieving your potential available*. London: Department of Health; 2004. http://www.dh.gov.uk/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4083236&chk=dx0t44.
2. Making sense of health. Making sense of health website: <http://www.makingsenseofhealth.org.uk>
3. Department of Health. *Volunteers Across the NHS: Improving the Patient Experience and Creating a Patient-led Service*. London: Department of Health; 2006. http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4131041&chk=B%2BFie5