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Gastroenterology placement: what nursing students can expect

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It's a specialty where you will develop core clinical and non-clinical skills, while learning from clinical nurse specialists and the multidisciplinary team



Picture: iStock

Gastrointestinal nursing services offer excellent multidisciplinary learning experiences for nursing students.

Gastroenterology is a hugely diverse specialty, offering students the opportunity to learn from expert nurses about a variety of gastrointestinal conditions.

There are many learning opportunities available, yet a lack of understanding of the specialty means these are often not fully appreciated.

What is gastroenterology?

So what is gastroenterology and what can you expect from a placement in this setting?

Gastroenterology focuses on the care of the digestive system. It covers a variety of conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), colorectal diseases, functional bowel disorders, liver disease, cancers of the stomach and pancreas, and digestive disorders.

'This is also a great specialty for honing your fundamental nursing skills'

There are numerous specialties, ranging from medical and surgical wards to endoscopy departments, colorectal and upper gastrointestinal (GI) cancer services, stoma care, clinical research units, continence services and clinical nutrition services.

What types of patients and healthcare professionals will I work with?

Gastroenterology nurses care for adult patients of all ages. Patients often need acute care as well as long-term support, including health promotion advice and education on how to self-manage their condition.

Gastroenterology nurses adopt a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach to planning treatment and care. Clinical placements offer the opportunity to work with a wide team, including gastroenterology consultants, physiotherapists, radiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, dieticians, nursing support workers, and social workers.



A stoma Picture: iStock

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Nursing students can work alongside clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) in a huge variety of areas, such as stoma care, nutrition, liver, colorectal and upper GI cancers, and continence, bladder and bowel care.

You will learn how nurse specialists plan care and support patients holistically throughout diagnosis, the many different treatment options and follow up, and about the complex work of the different CNSs across the four pillars of advanced practice: clinical practice, leadership and management, education and research.

What clinical skills will I learn?

You will learn a variety of core clinical skills, including medication management, patient assessment, wound management and infection control. This is also a great specialty for honing your fundamental nursing skills, such as supporting patients' personal hygiene, nutrition and hydration, and bladder and bowel health.

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Many of the skills in the [Nursing and Midwifery Council's standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) can be assessed and achieved in a gastroenterology setting, such as nasogastric tube placements, enteral feeding, intravenous therapy and stoma care.

Learning opportunities in gastrointestinal nursing

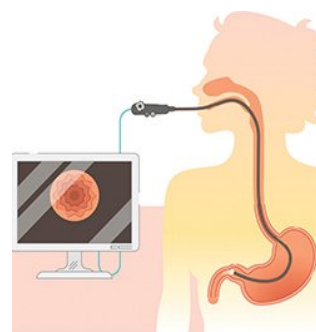
Learning from a stoma care CNS, you will gain an understanding of the reasons for formation of a stoma; the different types of stoma and possible complications; practical skills in the fundamentals of stoma care and how to carry out holistic patient assessments.

You will also gain a better understanding of the role of the stoma care CNS, which involves preoperative preparation; stoma siting; teaching and management of simple and complex stomas; preparing patients for discharge and attending outpatient clinics and home visits.

RCNiLearning: [Caring for patients with stoma](#)

Endoscopy

Endoscopy ambulatory units are busy and varied learning environments offering endoscopic investigations to inpatients and outpatients. If you are able to spend time in endoscopy as part of your placement or have a full placement in this setting, you will learn about pre-assessment; admission and discharge processes; upper and lower gastrointestinal endoscopy procedures; the



Endoscopy Picture: iStock

emergency care of patients with upper GI bleeding and specialist procedures, such as endoscopic ultrasounds, stent insertions and bronchoscopies.

Bowel screening

You may have the opportunity to work with specialist practitioners in the bowel cancer screening programme, gaining a better understanding of the screening pathway and how nurse specialists support patients through investigation, diagnosis and treatment.

RCNiLearning: Nurse-led approaches to reducing colorectal cancer

What non-clinical skills will I learn?

Health promotion and education is an important part of the nurse's role in gastroenterology, so good communication skills are vital.

This is a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of the patient experience of living with and managing a long-term condition and to develop your skills in building therapeutic relationships with patients.

'You will learn a lot about innovation and leadership from nurse specialists'

Working with a wide multidisciplinary team will enable you to develop your team-working and time management skills, and you will learn a lot about innovation and leadership from the nurse specialists in the different settings.

How can I prepare for a placement in this setting?

A good understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the gastrointestinal tract is essential before starting a placement in gastroenterology, so do your research. It is also important to read up on the different medications used to treat gastrointestinal conditions and keep up to date with the relevant clinical guidelines.

The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) has guidance on a range of gastrointestinal conditions, including managing GI emergencies such as GI bleeds, irritable bowel syndrome in adults, Crohn's disease management and colorectal cancer.

RCNiLearning: Care and management of adults with a high-output ileostomy

The RCN has a [comprehensive resource guide on gastroenterology](#) and the [Crohn's and Colitis UK](#) website also has lots of information.

If any of your fellow students have already had a placement in gastroenterology, speak to them to see if they have any advice before you start your placement. You can also contact the [RCN gastrointestinal nursing forum](#) for advice.

On behalf of the forum, we look forward to welcoming you to this diverse and exciting specialty.

RCNiLearning modules

- ▶ [Caring for patients with stoma](#)
- ▶ [Nurse-led approaches to reducing colorectal cancer](#)
- ▶ [Care and management of adults with a high-output ileostomy](#)

Further information

- ▶ [RCN gastroenterology resources](#)
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This article is written on behalf of the [RCN gastrointestinal nursing forum](#)

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[Linda_392996](#) 28/02/22 - 07:43am

We have a lot of students so this will be a valuable learning aud in Endoscopy

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