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**Case study**

Name: Karen McCarthy

Job title: Operating Theatre Support Assistant

I am a Theatre Support Assistant (TSA) in the Obstetrics & Gynaecology Emergency & Elective Theatre team. I have always wanted to work within a clinical role and couldn’t decide what to do. I attended an open day had an interview and was appointed initially in General Surgery.

**How did your career journey look prior to your current role?**

When I joined UHL in my admin role I completed some more learning and gained my Level 2 & 3 in Business Administration. I worked on the switchboard and became a Deputy Team Leader within 6 months, this was a very busy role, and I could answer up to 2,000 calls per day. I stayed in this role until I had my children and they were old enough so I could return to work without having to worry about nursery and childcare.

I then became a part time Ward Clerk, this too was very busy, keeping a ward up to date administration wise. A very challenging role as there are changes minute by minute and you need to be aware of all of these in order to keep everything up to date at all times. The time came to work full time as my husband was out of work. I applied for another part time role, was interviewed and became a Receptionist for the Day Case Unit. I would work from 7.30am until 12.30pm and then go to my evening job from 5pm until 9pm; this suited me at the time.

I was then made aware there was a Ward Clerk role within the Day Case Unit from 12pm until 3.30pm. I applied for this role and was appointed so I then worked full time. I did this for a number of years and I felt there was something else I could do, I needed a challenge!!! So I was seconded into the Corporate Complaints team for 9 months. This was a real eye opener for me, a type of admin I had never done before. I admit I found it a struggle at first, but I soon found my feet, dealing with all types of complaints within the NHS.

When my secondment was coming to an end I fancied a change and booked myself a space on an open day at the hospital to look around the operating theatres! Something totally out of my comfort zone. I absolutely loved it, applied for a role as a Health Care Assistant (HCA). I was invited to interview and to my utter shock I was appointed as a HCA for the General Surgery team. I am a quick learner and picked up my job role in no time, I was soon working within other theatres too and learned all aspects of the job within different specialities. Then I decided to do a bit more learning, so I did my NVQ level 2 In Health and Social Care and also my level 3. I love working in Theatres and felt that this is now something I should have done when I first left school. I have finished my Buddy and Mentor training to new Theatre Support Assistants and new nurses coming into theatres, I am quite proud of myself as I never thought I would be able to do this.

**What is a typical day for you?**

A typical day will start at either 8am or 8pm. We start the shift by making sure we have a clean and hygienic theatre. We have a team briefing meeting, where we discuss the patients that we are to operate on that shift; this is for elective patients that we know are coming in. We then check we have the correct equipment for the day. We will work in a team of 4 people. Roles in our theatres include Operating Department Practitioners (ODP), Circulators and Theatre Support Assistants (TSA) as well as anaesthetists, doctors and midwifes. If I am on the emergency team anything can happen. We could have a category one (emergency) patient whizzing down to theatre, we could have emergency buzzers going off alerting us of an emergency in a room where a patient is in labour, we could have a cord prolapse or a post-partum haemorrhage coming to theatre. If there is a gap in the theatre we need to read important emails, complete e-learning to keep our training up to date and have team meetings.

**Do you have any words of encouragement for anyone thinking about a career in health and social care?**

I would say to anyone thinking of joining the NHS to go for it, it has been the best thing I ever done, I have a great job, I have made lots of friends and there are endless opportunities. I feel you have a job for life the NHS will become your extended family. Team work is what it’s all about