

About this story

As a Society we are aware of the growing importance of Physician Associates (PA) within the NHS. We meet Abigail Watkin, a PA based at the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital and asked her about her experience of working in this role. At the time of writing, Ms Watkin has been a Physician Associate for two years.

What first attracted you to the role?

I always felt that I wanted to have a career in a medical field. I chose to study Physiology Pharmacology as my undergraduate degree but was driven to find a career where I could be involved directly in patient care. When I was in my final year of my undergraduate studies I discovered the role of PA.

By enrolling in Physician Associate Studies, at the University of Leeds, I was able to convert from a science graduate to being a medically trained healthcare professional. My first job was at Huddersfield and Calderdale NHS Trust, working on MAU and Gerontology.

For me, a big advantage of this role is that I do not rotate through specialties and therefore I am able to provide continuity of care for patients and indeed the team on the ward.

What are your key tasks and responsibilities in your role?

I really enjoy being part of the respiratory team. My role involves providing direct clinical care to patients. I get to work closely with all members of the MDT - the consultants, junior doctors, nurses and nurse specialists.

I support the team in a number of ways, for example:

- By reviewing patients on a ward round
- Formulating differential diagnoses and management plans

- Documenting notes for the consultant
- Performing diagnostic and therapeutic procedures
- Requesting and interpreting diagnostic studies

I am also involved in projects and audits, I have recently completed the national BTS NIV audit and I am due to complete a second audit within the respiratory department.

Which diagnostic and therapeutic procedures do you undertake?

As a qualified Physician Associate, I provide direct clinical care to patients, including clerking patients - history taking, clinical examinations, clinical skills - which includes venepuncture, blood cultures, cannulation, catheterisation, nasogastric tube insertion, arterial blood gases, suturing, chest drain removal, pleurodesis, and chest drain management. I am currently being trained to perform pleural procedures, including diagnostic and therapeutic aspirations and also chest drain insertion.

I diagnose, send appropriate referrals to different specialties, perform capacity assessments, review and interpret investigations and deliver appropriate treatment and management plans.

I work very closely to the multidisciplinary team on the ward and this has enabled me to develop a range of skills including leadership and excellent team working skills with other healthcare professionals. In addition, I am also involved in meetings with patients and families on a regular basis regarding discharge planning and medical updates.

Are you offered specific training and CPD?

In line with all healthcare professionals, PAs are required to complete regular CPD training and have an update to date portfolio. At present, we need to complete 50 hours of CPD training per year, I attend a variety of respiratory teaching and general medical teaching.

My portfolio is held by the Trust and reviewed at regular intervals by my clinical supervisor. I aim to get 4 case based discussions signed off every four months and also any new skills I have performed, including pleural procedures.

Is there anything helpful to PAs working in respiratory medicine that BTS could offer?

- Respiratory teaching events suitable for PAs
- Framework of skills respiratory PAs should aim to be competent in
- Case based discussions
- A faculty for respiratory PAs

How do you see the role of PA developing in the coming years?

This is great job and I have no doubt that the role of PAs in respiratory will continue to develop. Now I have been in post for a few years, I am being trained to perform pleural procedures, and I will also have the opportunity to review patients in outpatient clinics in the future. I feel with prescribing rights Physician Associates will have more independence and be able to progress further.

What advice would you offer to someone thinking about training as a PA?

The role of a PA is rewarding, exciting and dynamic. If you are considering a role as a PA I would advise getting in touch with the Faculty of Physician Associates at the Royal College of Physicians for more information. It is also

always worth making contact with someone who is working as a PA. Shadowing someone already doing the role is the perfect way to learn more.

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