Career Opportunities in Independent Hospitals
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The Association of Independent Healthcare Organisations (AIHO) is the trade association for independent hospitals across the United Kingdom. We represent over 250 hospitals that provide services to insured, self-paying and NHS-funded patients, as well as medical tourists. AIHO members vary from large hospital groups to smaller, specialist providers of specific surgeries and treatments.

For more information about AIHO please contact info@aiho.org.uk.
**Introduction**

Independent hospitals are dedicated to finding the very best staff. This means searching for the most enthusiastic, and motivated staff who are passionate about delivering excellent care to patients.

The independent sector is comprised of charitable and private healthcare services, caring for a mix of NHS, self-funding, medical tourists and insured patients. Hospitals are located all across the UK and cover a huge variety of clinical specialisms including oncology, orthopaedics, paediatrics, neurology and trauma.

Whether you are considering moving into healthcare and have limited experience, or you are a newly qualified professional and want to get your career off to a running start – the independent sector has lots to offer. Equally, if you want to progress your career to the next level by undertaking further training or education in a particular specialism, independent hospitals have numerous opportunities available to you.

The independent healthcare sector invests heavily in the training of its staff. From lectures and interactive workshops on patient safety, clinical governance and team work; through to funding of diplomas, degrees and Masters, the sector is committed to ensuring staff have access to resources to learn and develop and gain the qualifications they need to achieve their potential.

In this booklet, we explore career opportunities for nurses, healthcare assistants, allied health professionals and managers. Many of the people described in the following pages have progressed from being a newly qualified nurse or healthcare assistant through to being a ward sister or theatre manager. Others have been equipped with the tools and qualifications they need to specialise.

As their experiences show, independent hospitals operate a multi-disciplinary team model, where different professions and specialisms work side by side to give patients the best care possible. Staff learn from one another, with mentoring and ‘buddying’ programmes common. This, combined with further training and education, gives you as an individual the chance to meet your personal, professional and career goals.

We have spoken with staff, human resources directors, heads of learning and development across AIHO members to find out their experiences and what’s on offer.
What do Independent Sector Hospitals do?

Independent sector hospitals include charitable and private organisations. Acute hospitals offer a variety of services and specialisms. With the right qualifications and training, many of which are supported or provided by the hospitals, you can specialise in areas and services including:

- Dialysis
- Endoscopy
- In-vitro fertilisation
- Laser
- Mental healthcare
- Neuro-rehabilitation
- Oncology
- Orthopaedics
- Physiotherapy
- Radiography
- Surgery
Facts about Independent Hospitals

- More than 60,000 clinical staff are employed by the sector.
- Over 1.5 million patients receive surgical treatment in independent hospitals every year.
- Organisations in the sector provide further education and training for their staff. This ranges from funding diplomas and Master’s degrees to externally-run workshops on patient safety and clinical governance.
- On-the-job training, mentoring programmes with senior colleagues and in-house training offered across hospitals.
- Hospitals support staff to return to work or retrain after taking time out.
- Training programmes for staff are developed in collaboration with accredited bodies and universities.
- Staff are supported to develop themselves, ranging from the ability to undertake a degree, to learning about marketing and the business environment.
**Careers for Nurses**

**The importance of preceptorship**

As a newly qualified nurse, you want to ensure you give yourself the most productive start to your career. It is a challenging time and there is still lots of learning to be done. Independent hospitals recognise this and have identified and prioritised giving support to qualified nurses.

Preceptorship programmes can come in all shapes and sizes to suit you, programmes on offer are designed to specifically meet the needs of a newly qualified nurse who is entering employment for the first time following professional registration with the NMC. Programmes bring together a range of blended learning and development experiences, combined with the continuous support of a committed mentor.

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**Case Study**

Rebecca entered the independent sector as a newly-qualified Staff Nurse. She embarked upon her preceptorship programme from day one, working closely with a qualified nurse for six months. The programme focused on refining competencies, gaining confidence and on how to become a role model to colleagues.

After the programme, Rebecca was encouraged and supported by senior colleagues and the Dedicated Education Facilitator at her hospital to become a Senior Staff Nurse. Just 12 months after starting she had undertaken her mentorship training, followed by a Master’s module, which allowed her to become a Sister. She is now aiming to take another Master’s module so that she achieves a complete Masters in Health and Social Care.

Rebecca
Sister
Orthopaedic ward

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**Enhancing your clinical skills**

As a nurse, you will know that every day new developments are made in clinical practice all over the world. It is therefore crucial to continuously consolidate and refresh existing knowledge and skills, as well as to continue learning and updating your skill set. Independent hospitals offer nurses many opportunities to develop a range of skills that enables them to be flexible and react to different requirements.

Independent hospitals carry out a diverse range of services and rely on nurses of all descriptions to help deliver them. There is a national shortage of nurses to cover all the specialisms a modern independent hospital provides, such as ward staff, rehabilitation, theatre, and intensive care nurses. That’s why independent hospitals are working hard to develop their staff’s range of skills through numerous programmes, placement opportunities and partnerships with well-respected universities.

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Karen had always wanted to be a Theatre Nurse. So, when she saw the hospital was advertising a job with a full theatre development training programme, she leapt at the chance. Karen had three weeks of lectures, before being rotated around different areas of the hospital to gain more hands-on experience alongside more senior nurses. She was given a mentor for support and motivation, and has since progressed to being a Theatre Nurse for complex surgical procedures.

Following this, Karen has been given the opportunity to gain further qualifications, having started a mentorship course to support junior nurses. Building on the support the hospital has given her thus far, Karen is optimistic that she will be able to continue her education and eventually specialise further.

Karen
Scrub Nurse
Nurses as leaders

Independent hospitals know that nurses can be highly effective in leading wards and getting the most out of the people around them. The compassion that is essential to be a good nurse to a patient is also a vital attribute to lead others. That is why independent hospitals have developed programmes which harness nurses’ natural ability and equip them with the skills to manage colleagues effectively.

Julie started off her career in an independent hospital as a Staff Nurse, working two night shifts a week which worked well as she was caring for her young family. When the time was right she progressed to a Ward Sister on a day care unit focused on chemotherapy and paediatric patients. She was then encouraged by her manager and colleagues to become a Registered Sick Children’s Nurse (RSCN), specialising in the care of children. As part of this Julie undertook various qualifications including counselling and how to teach others.

Seeking a new challenge, Julie applied to be a Breast Care Nurse within the hospital. The organisation funded her six month degree level course which led to her becoming the Lead Nurse of a dedicated unit for breast plastic surgery. Julie has since undertaken the King’s Fund Nurse Leadership Programme and is now Deputy Matron at the hospital.
Developing the skills you need

One of the best ways for HCAs to learn the range of skills they need is through shadowing colleagues and watching practical demonstrations. Independent hospitals encourage this as much as possible, but also recognise that sometimes you might need guidance on areas other than just technical practice. Because of the close-contact care that you give as a HCA, the independent sector supports HCAs in learning ‘soft skills’ such as empathy and team work.

Careers for Healthcare Assistants

Becoming a Healthcare Assistant (HCA)

HCAs play an invaluable role within independent hospitals. Not only are they a vital support to their team on the ward or in theatre, passionate HCAs are essential to a high-quality patient experience. Independent hospitals offer staff the chance to extend their scope of HCA clinical practice and competence to meet patient needs and their own areas of interests, and the opportunity to train and gain further qualifications.

Many hospitals include the recruitment, training and retention of HCAs as part of their long-term workforce strategy. Ensuring a strong cohort of HCAs gives qualified nurses the support they need to fulfil their role and provides a critical entry level for people who may want to make the longer term journey into a nursing or health-related career.

CASE STUDY

Samantha was one of 12 individuals who took part in an apprenticeship scheme for HCAs, run in conjunction with a local college. During the first six months Samantha and her cohort became essential members of the hospital team, working closely with their mentors and completing essential competencies. During the following six months, Samantha gained her Level 2 Apprenticeship in Health Care and was offered the opportunity to apply for a full time role as a HCA in the organisation. She is currently embarking on a qualification at Level 3, funded by the hospital, which will give Samantha the skills to work in the hospital’s outpatient oncology department. Other HCAs who started alongside her have undertaken apprenticeship qualifications to obtain theatre scrub skills or to work on the maternity or paediatric wards.

Samantha
Healthcare Assistant

CASE STUDY

Simon started work in the hospital as a Porter, progressing to Healthcare Support Worker within the same year. The hospital funded his Qualifications and Credit Framework Level 2 and Level 3. This included distance learning online, lectures at a local university and mentoring from colleagues. Simon’s promotion inspired him to continue his personal and professional development, with the eventual aim of becoming a nurse. With this longer-term goal in mind, the hospital is allowing him flexible working to study for Maths & English GCSEs at college on a part time basis, as well as providing ongoing access to the expertise and advice of senior colleagues.

Simon
Healthcare Support Worker
Specialising as a Healthcare Assistant

If you want to become a HCA in a specialist area, independent hospitals offer comprehensive training programmes to do so. Foundation courses are often available, allowing you to gain a formal qualification as a specialist through a combination of classroom training and hands-on workplace experience.

Once you’ve completed one of these programmes, you should have the confidence and ability to deliver excellent and compassionate patient care in your chosen area.

As a HCA joining the organisation Chris completed a classroom-based induction course that covered the areas that he needed to know before starting on shift supporting patients. Given the needs of the patients he was working with, this included an introduction to the Mental Health Act, and information on inclusive practice and empathy at work. The induction was delivered by a variety of staff at the hospital including the Dietician, Staff Nurse, Hospital Director and Clinical Psychologist. Being trained and exposed early on to a wide variety of clinical staff gave Chris the benefit of their vast experience and knowledge. It also helped Chris to see how to support the broader hospital team in delivering patient care as a HCA.

After completing classroom-based learning, Chris began shadowing other HCAs for a period of time. This helped to familiarise him with a hospital environment, having previously worked in community care. Over the following months Chris developed skills and knowledge through a variety of methods such as e-learning, coaching and further classroom teaching. He now has plans to undertake a recognised qualification sponsored by the hospital.

Chris
Healthcare Assistant
Jilly began working at her hospital as a Receptionist in the radiology department, but was soon given the opportunity to become a Clinical Imaging Assistant after expressing an interest in progressing to a clinical role. At first, she helped with X-raying, ultrasounds and MRI scans before quickly being offered training in DEXA scanning, a specialist method to assess bone density.

Radiographers in the department gave Jilly one-on-one training sessions to introduce her to the method, which she built on through attending a series of workshops. Jilly then applied to the hospital for funding to do further specialist training with the National Osteoporosis Society to earn a formal qualification. Her application was approved and paid for in full by the hospital. Throughout training, she was able to draw on the advice and expertise of her colleagues in the department, which helped her achieve her final qualification.

Erika began her career with the organisation as a HCA on the ward, caring for patient’s pre- and post-operative surgery. After two years she felt she would like to try being in theatre, having never worked in one before but always found the work interesting.

The hospital gave her the opportunity to train to be an Assistant Theatre Practitioner across a wide range of surgeries including orthopaedics and endoscopy. Erika’s course was delivered through a mix of in-house training and mentorships, as well as a number of externally-run courses. In a recent appraisal, Erika and her manager decided she would take her career a step further and study to become an Operating Department Practitioner (ODP).
Careers for Allied Health Professionals

Building your skills base

The diagnostic, technical and therapeutic roles performed by Allied Health Professionals (AHP) are crucial to our healthcare system. AHPs ensure a truly holistic patient experience, creating an integrated and multi-disciplinary team around the individual. From Occupational Therapists to Dieticians and Radiographers, AHPs provide another channel for effective communication with the patient, as well as interacting with other professionals in the clinical environment.

As an AHP, you will know that a huge range of specialisms are included under the title, from physiotherapy to radiology. But, whatever area you work in, one factor is common across all AHPs – you are an expert in your field and provide treatment and support that has a real impact on patients’ lives. Because of this crucial role, the independent sector is dedicated to the professional development of AHPs. Hospitals offer lots of opportunities for mentoring, formal training and diploma and degree-level courses to help staff achieve their potential and beyond.

As a trainee or newly qualified AHP, support from colleagues is critical to help you gain confidence and meet your objectives. In the independent sector, this support is readily available. Many hospitals operate a ‘buddy’ system to guide you through any challenges you face in the early stages of joining the organisation.

The importance of mentoring from senior colleagues to facilitate learning and self-assurance is well-established across the sector, alongside recognition that senior staff benefit from being mentors too.

Andrew is an Occupational Therapist and was supported to return to practice by the hospital he now works at having taken some time off. He completed 60 working days and undertook private study in order to regain his working status. Now on a permanent contract, Andrew’s knowledge base and skills have been developed further through in-service training including in adult and child protection. He is also undertaking physiotherapy competencies in order to ensure patients receive a smooth transition from entering hospital to settling in at home again. Following his annual appraisal and setting of personal objectives, Andrew has been tasked with reviewing the pre-operative pathway for hip and knee operations. He is looking to ensure the current approach delivers patient satisfaction efficiently, from pre-assessment through to communicating with social services following discharge.

Andrew
Occupational Therapist

Anne-Marie is a Physiotherapist and was eager to work across a number of therapy areas. Since starting work, she has been able to build on her qualification and gain experience in different areas of the hospital. She worked on the inpatient ward for 18 months and has been working in outpatients for the last three and a half years, gaining clinical experience.

During this period, Anne-Marie had the opportunity to train as a Pilates Instructor to provide additional support to her patients. She also undertook a course to become a Clinical Educator, which requires annual top-up refreshers to ensure she remains abreast of changes to guidelines. Anne-Marie has enjoyed being a Clinical Educator, as it has allowed her to mentor students whilst giving her an opportunity to reflect on her own knowledge and learning.

In the long term, Anne-Marie would like to become an Extended Scope Practitioner (ESP) and specialise in foot and ankle physiotherapy. She is about to embark on an ESP course, after which she will be qualified to order X-rays, MRI scans and interpret blood tests. As a result, she will be able to take on a broader role, giving patients more guidance about which treatment pathways to follow, whether that be physiotherapy or an appointment with an orthopaedic consultant. The course will be delivered to Anne-Marie through a combination of in-house training, mentoring from experienced physiotherapists and external courses.

Anne-Marie
Physiotherapist

Anne-Marie completed her three year undergraduate course in physiotherapy, she was eager to work across a number of therapy areas. Since starting work, she has been able to build on her qualification and gain experience in different areas of the hospital. She worked on the inpatient ward for 18 months and has been working in outpatients for the last three and a half years, gaining clinical experience.

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Andrew
Occupational Therapist
Alongside mentoring, the independent sector offers lots of opportunities to work in different parts of the hospital. This is a great way of gaining experience and working out where you want your career to go in the long-term. Once you decide if and where you would like to specialise further, you can expect to be given financial support to attend a range of internal or external courses to gain the qualifications you need.

**Allied Health Professionals as Managers**

As well as clinical skills, it’s important that AHPs can focus on their personal development and communication skills. The independent sector has a strong track record of developing AHPs into managerial roles. The combination of experience in clinical practice, engaging with other professionals and caring for patients, is invaluable in effectively leading teams.

**CASE STUDY**

Diane has been a Physiotherapist for 24 years. She became a Team Leader after thoroughly enjoying the more managerial aspects of the role, and now hopes to progress further into departmental management. To help her achieve this, Diane’s General Manager and Matron put her forward for an aspiring leadership course at the Institute of Leadership and Management. The course will take 18 months to complete, after which she will have a Level 7 Leadership and Management vocational qualification. Diane hopes this will enable her to perform better in her current job whilst also giving her the skills to further progress her career.
Careers for Managers

Leaders in patient safety

Managers are responsible for instilling the culture required in staff to deliver person-centred and safe patient care. As a manager, the decisions you make determine how effectively and efficiently an entire hospital operates, shaping the patient experience. It is therefore extremely important that managers and managers-in-training have access to the development opportunities and support networks that are needed to fulfil such a demanding role.

Independent hospitals pride themselves on recruiting and nurturing managers from a range of backgrounds, some bringing excellent managerial expertise from a non-healthcare environment as well as some with a wealth of clinical experience. Independent hospitals strive to give patients the best experience possible and this cannot be done without expert managers leading motivated teams of people.

As a Senior Physiotherapist in the hospital, Paul supervised a number of junior physiotherapists. Through being in charge of their personal and professional development, Paul became interested in service development and ensuring the services offered by the hospital best served patients and harnessed the skills of staff. Paul was soon appointed Head of Physiotherapy in the hospital. Having autonomy over both the clinical and managerial side of the department, prompted Paul to consider taking management further and how he might be able to change the wider hospital for the better.

Paul applied for the organisation’s Director of Operations programme. This involved a year studying for his MBA, followed by an 18 month programme working alongside, and being mentored by, the Hospital’s Director of Operations, Director of Clinical Services and Executive Director. Paul was fully immersed in the hospital’s strategy and supported to develop the skills to run a hospital and set its culture. He is now the Executive Director.

Paul
Executive Director

CASE STUDY
Commercially-focused

Independent hospitals firmly believe that the best ideas come from the people who see patients day in and day out. Managers need to be able to extract those ideas from staff and use them effectively to improve patient care. This means hospital managers must continuously look ahead at how services should be delivered in five years’ time to secure the best hospital environment for future and present patients alike.

The healthcare sector is complex and challenging and hospitals form a central role in the UK’s health infrastructure. Managing a hospital requires excellent commercial skills in order to effectively bring about change and develop and establish new ways of working. Building up a strong commercial understanding of how to reduce wastage, improve procurement and implement innovative processes is invaluable for any trainee manager. Independent hospitals also recognise that for staff to be the best they can be, continual professional learning and development is crucial to supporting already well-established managers in adapting to new demands and challenges.

Margaret-Anne joined the hospital ten years ago as a Customer Services Manager, effectively managing a small group of administrative staff and absorbing and learning from patient feedback - ten years later, she is the General Manager of the hospital.

First of all, she secured funding through the organisation’s scholarship programme to study project management. She was then allowed to not just participate in projects in the hospital but to manage them. This gave Margaret-Anne the confidence and the ability to apply for the organisation’s corporate leadership programme. One of the organisation’s directors was appointed as her mentor and she undertook an MBA giving her much more of a strategic and commercial focus, leading to her eventual appointment as General Manager of the hospital.

Richard started at a busy seven theatre hospital as a Healthcare Assistant in the operating theatre. After 18 months, the hospital decided the materials department and the theatre department needed to work together more closely which meant that he was exposed to another side of the organisation. Richard was then given the chance to become a Team Leader in the materials department, where he developed a new scheme for the hospital that ensured theatre and materials were operating more efficiently. The scheme has since been rolled out across the whole organisation.

When a Deputy Theatre Manager role was advertised, Richard felt confident applying for the role having already managed a number of colleagues as a Team Leader. Now a busy Deputy Theatre Manager, Richard is scheduling and managing operations and staff including consultants, as well as purchasing major pieces of equipment. He now has ambitions to become Operations Director at the hospital, having gained a strong understanding of how the organisation works.
Next Steps

If you are interested in starting or continuing your career in the independent sector, there is a great deal more information available to help you make a decision.

Most universities and colleges offer open days to let prospective students find out more. You may also want to look into volunteering or a temporary work placement in a healthcare environment in order to gain insight into what caring for patients is like in practice and work out whether it’s right for you.

Whether you are yet to obtain any clinical or managerial qualifications, or are a registered professional looking for support to develop and extend your expertise, employers offer access and resources for learning and training. Many organisations will support you to obtain further qualifications through study leave or flexible working arrangements. Many roles do not require any experience or qualifications at entry level – just check the job criteria before applying.

The NHS and the independent sector work closely together. This means qualifications, skills or course certifications obtained in either sector will be recognised.

For more information on what is available in the independent sector, please contact your local independent hospital. To view a series of videos on career opportunities please visit www.aiho.org.uk.
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