

## Nicole Dolan, Podiatrist, discusses her journey from student to registered professional during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Transition from student to registered professional?

I found the transition from student to a qualified registered staff member, exciting but nerve wracking at the same time. It was exciting as I was about to begin a lifelong progressive career, but in conjunction with this I was beginning my career in the middle of a pandemic and treating only high-risk patients, this was particularly daunting. Nonetheless, the support from all my team has been great, from colleagues of similar banding through to team leads and quadrant managers, they have always been a phone-call/email away and have always helped answer queries I have had in the highest of standards. This is a quality I would like to be able to share with new graduates coming into the service.

I don't recall facing any challenges in the workplace, but I would say I was most nervous about lone-working on domiciliary settings. My team lead paired me up with a more experienced member of staff who demonstrated how to conduct domiciliary visits by going on joint visits until I felt ready to do so. Firstly, I would watch my colleague treat the patient and we discussed dressing's choices and why, explaining actions to the patients and then going back to base and updating the admin side of things. Secondly, we went out together, but I was the lead podiatrist who made decisions and discussed management plans with patients. By shadowing a more experienced member of staff it instilled me with the confidence I needed to do domiciliary visits on my own as I now knew how to best conduct myself and it was the best way to learn how to use Trakcare etc instead of reading about it, I got to use it with additional support and supervision. This helped me a great deal overcome my nerves about going out on domiciliary visits, in conjunction with knowing any help I may need was on the other side of the phone.

### Impact, learning and support – joining NHSGGC during pandemic

Joining the service as a newly qualified podiatrist during the pandemic has provided me with a wealth of opportunities and knowledge. For the most part, it has probably pushed me outwith my comfort zone but as a result, it has made me a more confident podiatrist. I have experienced working with very high-risk patients, which has resulted in me making decisions I did not ever have to make as a student. An example of a time when I had to be confident in my clinical judgement was when a patient presented at a domiciliary review with life threatening critical limb ischaemia. I then had to ensure I knew all of the foot protection algorithms in order to best escalate the patient through the most appropriate pathway for further management of their condition. On reflection of this experience, it confirmed I was confident in using the available pathways and was able to escalate patient care when necessary. I don't think I would have had the opportunity to utilise these pathways/algorithms pre-pandemic as I wouldn't have been responsible for such a high-risk cohort. Experiences such as the one forementioned have allowed me to reflect and learn during clinical supervision sessions, ultimately allowing me to bond with colleagues, as due to Covid we have not been in as much face-to-face contact as what we would have been previously.

As a new graduate the main learning opportunity available to me was Flying Start. I was aligned to a facilitator to work through it with and we were provided protected time to complete the modules. I do not think this experience has been impaired by the pandemic as it has been an enjoyable learning and bonding experience with colleagues. It has allowed me to set targets and goals and work towards them, whilst continuously reflecting and learning on my experiences. One experience that has had an impact during this time, was when I had to question a GP's clinical decision to prescribe another course of antibiotics, which were proving ineffective on numerous occasions. I had to call the GP and advise of my concern of choice of antibiotic due to concern of how many unsuccessful courses the patient had been put on and highlight my concern to the GP around patient potentially becoming resistant to these antibiotics. As a result of a very transparent, honest and professional conversation with the GP the patient was prescribed an alternative antibiotic and this was successful in managing their infection.

On reflection of this, it demonstrated to myself that challenging other clinical decisions when you disagree is not a negative and can impact the patient care positively. It has also provided me with confidence to ask questions, this experience will stay with me as I move through my career as I will know the most professional way to approach and what outcome I expect. Moving forward I will always implement 'Care and Compassion' into every interaction I have with patients, as throughout the course of the pandemic I have learned how lonely some patients are and we are sometimes the only company they get. From this reflection and experience I will ensure to always be considerate and aware of patients home circumstances.

As a NQP I was paired with a "buddy" who I shadowed in clinics/domiciliary visits before I was working myself. This helped me settle in quickly and I felt as though I learned the workings of administration systems quicker as I was actively doing them. Where I work in the South Quadrant of NHSGGC, we have an on-call Foot Protection Podiatrist, although this is a support network for the whole team, I have often utilised this whenever I have felt out my depth or needed some guidance on a particular treatment plan, or simply needed a confidence boost. This has allowed me to develop more as a Podiatrist and again has helped with my confidence in my knowledge and skillset. Again, although Clinical Supervision is a NHSGGC incentive, I have actively engaged with each supervision session, this has allowed for discussion with colleagues around our experiences whereby we identify what was done well, what could have been done better and where additional learning may need to be instilled. This method of support has again allowed me to gel well with my team as we all utilise the opportunity to lead conversations around learning and have a general catch up, ensuring everyone is coping with work and home life keeping the current circumstances in mind. As a NQP clinical supervision has been my only opportunity to meet some members of staff, so I think this has been a worthy activity for me to engage in. Another method of support that has been made available to me has been an informal appraisal with my Team Lead, this was a great method of support as it allowed me to raise any concerns I may have had (I had none) or ask any questions whether it be clinical questions, administration questions or talk about personal development and how they can aid me fulfil my personal/professional development. This informal meeting was face to face, which allowed for it to be more personal and allowed for an opportunity for me to get to know my team lead better and feedback to them that I have enjoyed working with them and vice-versa. The support from all my team has made my experience enjoyable. I can't think of anything that would have made my experience as a newly qualified practitioner better, my expectations were exceeded.

## **Flying Start learning outcomes**

I have been relating my learning and development to the Flying Start learning outcomes and this has been easy to do. I have been keeping a folder of all my reflective answers and my facilitator and I have taken the time to discuss them and add in additional information/experiences when they arise and I will use this as my Flying Start portfolio.

At this time, I feel as though I have achieved the clinical practice unit, facilitating learning unit (use POMS example) and the leadership unit. An example of facilitating all of the above units into my daily work has been demonstrated by my role in the Prescription Only Medicine Group (POMS) for the South Team, I am chairperson and feel as though this demonstrates my ability to work reflectively, lead a team and facilitate others learning and development as well as my own. In addition to feeling as though I have achieved these units, I feel as though I have achieved, and I am an active participant in unit 4. I am currently the moving and handling assessor for South West Quadrant, this allows me to engage with and be a part of service developments.