



interview



on the frontline  
being there  
in the hard  
times

**Sarah** talks to us about  
her work as an oncology  
research nurse

***Which area of nursing or midwifery are you in?***

I am currently working as a clinical research nurse in head and neck and neuro-oncology.

***Why did you choose this speciality?***

I worked on a head and neck surgical oncology ward as a student and really enjoyed the speciality so I got a job on that ward when I qualified. I particularly enjoyed the variety and complexity of caring for patients with head and neck cancer, which included post-operative care, tracheostomy care, enteral feeding and palliative care. I have had an interest in research since I was a student. After a couple of years on the ward I decided to apply for a job as a research nurse and when I found out that it was in head and neck and neuro-oncology it seemed like a good fit.

***What motivates you in your work?***

I find it a privilege to be able to be there for people in the hard times and in some small way make it more bearable. Head, neck and brain cancers have some of the poorest outcomes in comparison to other cancer types, so I feel research into new and more effective treatments for these patients is really important.

***What does a typical day look like for you?***

As with a lot of nursing jobs, there isn't really a typical day for me. I am fortunate in this role to work 9-5ish. Sometimes I am in head and neck clinic, other times I am in neuro clinic and sometimes I am in the office – but usually I am running between the three! I am also always at the end of the phone or my bleep if any of my patients have any concerns or queries. A clinic day involves meeting with patients who are potentially eligible for trials and seeing patients who are on treatment or who we are following up after completing treatment. I spend a lot of time coordinating my patients' care, which involves tasks such as ordering and booking their scans, taking their blood and monitoring for any side effects. Some of my more office based jobs include reviewing patients' notes and data entry.

***What are the particular challenges about your job?***

Sometimes, I am looking after patients who have exhausted all mainstream treatments. This is hard as some of them pin all their hope on the trial treatment, that may or may not help them, and when they have to come off the trial their hope is lost. I am challenged about how to show real compassion to my patients without giving them false hope.

I am reminded of Isaiah 40:8, 'the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever'.

### ***What are the particular blessings of your job?***

I get to support people at a really scary time in their life and help coordinate their care so they are freed up to focus on what is really important to them. It is a real privilege to see and support the same patients on a regular basis and to get to know them well. I find it really rewarding when one of my patients calls me up with a concern and I am able to assist in some way.

### ***How did you find the transition from student to qualified nursing?***

I found the responsibility of being a qualified nurse scary and I often found myself worrying about whether I had done things right. I also found it very rewarding – it was a lovely feeling when patients first started asking for me, as their nurse, and when I was able to help them.

### ***Any advice for student nurses and midwives reading this?***

Everyone always says this, but it really is worth asking lots of questions and never being embarrassed to admit you don't know. It is far better not to know and to seek help, then to

go ahead and do something and realise later you have made a mistake. However, sadly everyone makes mistakes of some sort (nurses are human), so admit to anything you feel you have done wrong and learn from any mistakes you have made – but don't beat yourself up too much. In the hard times, or when I have felt like I haven't been the nurse I had hoped I would be, I have found it helpful to remember Proverbs 19:21. I can make many plans, but ultimately it is God's will that will prevail.

### ***What can we be praying for you?***

I would love you to pray that I would be a good witness to my colleagues at work. Pray that I would work hard not for my own success but because I want to please Jesus, my ultimate boss. Please also pray that the hope that I have in Jesus would shine through the way that I work and that I would be compassionate to my patients without promoting false hope in earthly things. 🌸