

Elizabeth Cardwell



An apprentice on the Covid front-line

Elizabeth Cardwell has just completed a Customer Service Level 2 apprenticeship with the Apprenticeship and Development Centre at University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (Leicester's Hospitals), where she also works.

Managing patient care in a pandemic

Elizabeth has just completed an apprenticeship and works as part of the non-medical admin team at University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. She has been in her role for 18 years and understandably has a strong and long-standing relationship with many of the people who attend the hospital for medical care.

We asked Elizabeth how the current pandemic has affected those relationships. "Our patients are so wonderful that they make my job not really a job to me - it is a way of life. As a Trust we have adapted our working practices, as much as we can, to keep both staff and patients safe. It means I have missed seeing them in 'real life', as many of our services are being carried out remotely, wherever possible."

"My key role has been to ensure that the continuity of service, care and support is there" Elizabeth adds. "With many people feeling anxious about the Covid situation I feel more of a sense of responsibility to ensure I can do as much as I can to support both colleagues and patients through this time".

Balancing work and family commitments

Like many of the key workers who have kept the country going through the pandemic, Elizabeth has faced some personal challenges. She is a mum of two boys who themselves had routines turned upside down. Her husband working from home has been different to the norm and her youngest son has felt anxious about his mum at times because she works in a hospital.

"Sometimes I found the juggling of all these elements a challenge" says Elizabeth. "It was hard to say to my children that there is nothing to fear when inside I was feeling apprehensive and nervous myself" she adds. Ensuring elderly relatives were cared for at the same time added to her family responsibilities. But she has found great support from her colleagues at work, her employer and the public too and the overwhelming support and generosity touched her a lot. She hopes the coming together of communities will continue beyond the current crisis.

Completing her apprenticeship

The Apprenticeship and Development Centre at Leicester's Hospitals have been a great support to Elizabeth while she completed her apprenticeship studies. "The Learning and Development team has been the absolute pinnacle

of fantastic!" says Elizabeth. The team there adapted learning methods to suit her circumstances, were always contactable and she says they gave her the strength to know that despite Covid, with their support, they would get to the end of the apprenticeship together.

"Getting results during lockdown has been a welcome distraction from the Covid climate" says Elizabeth. "And the motivation of achieving and passing was something to aim for when the days were hard, knowing I was doing this to not only improve myself but would demonstrate to my children that despite Covid anything was possible - even Mummy passing her course!"

As an adult learner, Elizabeth has experienced a unique set of challenges. "Doing an apprenticeship in my 40's was always going to push my boundaries of confidence and self-belief. However the skills I have picked up through study days and learning has made me stronger and resilient. and Since results day I know that I can do anything I put my mind to, nothing is impossible with teamwork and positive mental attitude".

Beyond Covid-19

Despite testing times over the past few months Elizabeth feels she has really developed in her practice. "I believe having to adapt to the pandemic has developed my interpersonal skills, such as flexibility in thinking and working patterns, as well as responding to unexpected situations" Elizabeth says. "Most of all, from the empathy I received from my colleagues and course facilitator, I have learnt that having empathy for others is paramount. It means I can carry out my role in a way that embodies compassion, care and commitment to others" she continues.

Ultimately Elizabeth has come through this unprecedented situation with one overwhelming emotion - pride. "I also felt at a crossroads as the apprenticeship had been such a journey for me one that included family, patients and colleagues through the experience" She adds. "It has been almost 30 years since I left school and to go back to education was a huge step for me. Now my apprenticeship is complete I am left with a passion for learning and a thirst for knowledge".

And what about her future post Covid-19 plans? "I would like to move into a role in which I can provide the mentorship, coaching and support I have received from others" says Elizabeth. "Even though I have completed my apprenticeship the Learning and Development team are still there to advise on next steps and give me wonderful career guidance and signposting".

With thanks to Elizabeth and the Apprenticeship team from Leicester's Hospitals.