

Nuclear Medicine Nurses

What are nuclear medicine nurses?

Nuclear medicine nurses are qualified nurses who work in the field of nuclear medicine. They usually have at least 2 years of post-registration experience and are often highly skilled practitioners in the field.

Nursing roles within nuclear medicine departments can vary a great deal but will have many core elements in common. As with many other nursing roles, nuclear medicine nurses must have excellent clinical skills combined with the ability to communicate well with both patients and other healthcare professionals. They will also need to develop a comprehensive understanding of nuclear medicine practice, including radiation protection issues.

Nuclear medicine nurses will often be the main point of contact for patients when attending the department, playing a key role in explaining complex procedures as well as providing reassurance and advice about the small amount of radioactivity to which they will be exposed. They may also act as the main point of contact between the nuclear medicine department and other healthcare professionals both within the wider hospital and out in the community as well as playing a vital role in ensuring effective communication and co-ordination between members of the multidisciplinary team within the nuclear medicine department itself.

Clinically, they will be responsible for assessing and monitoring patients while in the nuclear medicine department. In many nuclear medicine departments nurses are also responsible for administering the radioactive substances to patients. This is often done by injection and requires training in venepuncture and cannulation. They may also be responsible for co-ordinating the provision of procedures and care within the department as well as performing, or assisting other healthcare professionals to perform, these services.

More senior and experienced nuclear medicine nurses may help provide supervision, training and support to other nuclear medicine professionals. This might include training staff to recognise emergency situations in patients such as hypoglycaemia, anaphylaxis and problems associated with the critically ill.

What training is needed?

The first step is to qualify as a registered nurse by gaining a diploma or degree in nursing. This usually takes 3 or 4 years with half of the training being theoretical and half being clinical. Different levels of funding from the

NHS are offered depending on your personal circumstances and the type of course you are taking.

You will normally need a minimum of two years of post-registration experience before deciding to specialise in nuclear medicine nursing. It then takes 3 months of work-based study with a final assessment of competency to become a nuclear medicine operator. Knowledge and skills will need to be updated regularly, often by attending study days locally. Additional professional development courses relating to nuclear medicine can also be taken as you progress through your career.

Further information

- The British Nuclear Medicine Society is the specialist society for all professions working in the nuclear medicine field in the UK. Further information can be found on their website at www.bnms.org.uk
- The Royal College of Nursing is the UK society representing nurses and nursing. Further information about training to be a nurse and careers within nursing can be found on their website at www.rcn.org.uk
- The Nursing and Midwifery Council establishes standards of education, training, conduct and performance for nursing and midwifery in the UK. Further information about nursing can be found on their website at www.nmc-uk.org