

What is a Prison Nurse?

A prison nurse is a registered nurse who works in a prison. Prison nurses can either be employed directly by the Prison Service or can work in the NHS and spend part of their working week in prison healthcare. Prisons are challenging places to deliver care. For example, surveys have shown that as many as 90% of prisoners have a diagnosable mental illness, substance abuse problem or often both.

Your responsibilities

A Prison Nurse works in a similar way to a nurse who works in the community, rather than in a hospital. The challenge is to deliver high quality treatment and care within a custodial setting, while maintaining a secure and safe environment.

The effects of your role will have far reaching implications beyond healthcare alone. Improving health behaviour and mental health have a significant impact on preventing re-offending, so your work directly affects the general public as well as the prisoners and their friends and family.

Skills required

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with people in prison calls for an abundance of skills and compassion. You will draw upon custodial and people skills, as well as clinical competencies. Working as a team or individually, you'll need to be aware of the pressures felt by patients and colleagues. You'll need to think on your feet and make quick decisions, while remaining sensitive to the needs of the prisoner.

(continued overleaf)

Entry requirements

To become a prison nurse, you need to have qualified as a registered nurse first by undertaking either a degree or diploma in nursing. For more information on entry into nursing, contact NHS Careers on 0845 60 60 655 or visit www.nhs.uk/careers

Registered nurses preferably on parts 1, 3, 12 or 13 of the NMC Professional register, with at least 1 year of post registration experience are employed in the service. There are also a further range of eligibility criteria, for example relating to your right to residency in the UK, which can be obtained from the Prison Service website at www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

Training programme

People are our biggest asset. You will get training on prison related aspects of your work, in addition to normal continuing professional development activities. The partnership between the Prison Service and NHS means that work and development opportunities are available to you in both organisations, and you may be able to work in both organisations at the same time. Prison specific training is also available, including healthcare manager leadership training, NVQ in custodial healthcare and transcultural healthcare practice training. Specific mental health training is also being developed. Comprehensive induction programs are available at a local level.

Working in Prison Health

The Prison Service protects the public by holding those committed by the courts in a safe environment. Step inside a prison and you'll find a functioning, self-contained community providing many of the essential services existing in any small town, such as educational facilities, library, place of worship, clinic, catering, laundry and a wide range of therapeutic services.

In order for the Prison to deliver this vital service, it relies upon many different highly skilled professionals, each with a part to play. The specialist expertise of prison nurses make them key players in the healthcare and prison team. Most prison nurses have general and mental health experience but child and learning disability nurses are also valued members of the team in some prisons.

Staff conditions

Safe and controlled conditions are a priority of all prisons for both staff and prisoners.

The Prison Service and NHS are also committed to finding flexible and family-friendly ways of working that help people to keep their work and personal lives in balance as their careers develop.

It's a unique organisation. If you'd like to be part of a team with a common aim of improving people's health and delivering high quality treatment to everybody who needs it, working in a prison might be for you.

Career prospects

Career prospects for prison nurses are good and there are increasing opportunities to work in Prison Health Services as part of a more broadly based career that also includes work in NHS settings. In addition, most managers of healthcare facilities in prisons are registered nurses.

All nursing grades have an opportunity to develop their management potential. You benefit from working closely with other healthcare staff with different skills and expertise from your own. Academic development is encouraged from certified learning to Masters level, accessing the same training opportunities as NHS staff via WDC (Workforce Development Confederations) based on the needs of the service and your individual development.

There are opportunities to move between NHS and HMPS via job share, job swap and secondment schemes. Your NHS pension will remain unaffected by a transfer to Prison Health. Environmental allowances are available.

How to apply

For degree courses in nursing, apply through: The University and Colleges Admission Services, PO Box 28, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3SH
Tel: 01242 223 707 www.ucas.com

For diploma courses in nursing, apply through: Nursing and Midwifery Admissions Service, Rosehill, New Barn Lane, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 3LZ
Tel: 01242 223 707 (application package)
Tel: 01242 55 4949 (general enquiries)

Both Prison Service and NHS Vacancies for prison nurses are advertised independently, primarily in the nursing press. You should contact or visit your local prison, Primary Care Trust (PCT) or NHS Trust for more information about current vacancies.

For more information about prison nursing as a career visit the Prison Health website www.doh.gov.uk/prisonhealth or contact NHS Careers,
PO Box 376,
Bristol BS99 3EY
0845 60 60 655
www.nhs.uk/careers