

# A day in the life of a student nurse: Overworked, underpaid - but happy to help

**Becky Jackson**  
Student nurse

My alarm goes off at 06.15. The early starts don't bother me, I've become used to them. I take a quick shower and put on my uniform. Some people moan about uniforms, and they are not comfy but I still get a feeling of pride wearing it. I get in for the start of my shift at 07.30.

We are short-staffed as usual, but then the ward next door called and said they had only one support worker, could they borrow one of ours. We are always borrowing stuff from each other - on Sundays when the laundry is shut there is the scrap for linen.

When most of our patients are doubly incontinent, we shouldn't be put in a position where we have to barter and swap towels for sheets with the psychiatric wards.

We get a report of all the patients from the night staff - they always look shattered.

I start to get my patients up. In an hour and a half, I can usually wash, dress and document the care of six patients. I know that we really should be spending more time on that and it's a shame because I really enjoy that part of my day. But there's so much else to do, we have to just get on with it as quickly as possible.

Today is Monday so it's especially busy because all patients have to have their routine MRSA bacteria swabs done. Last week we had a patient contract MRSA, the first one in a long time, so our ward manager is panic stricken that we might get another.

By the time all the basic care is done it's 10.45 and I take a 15 minute break.

I'm placed on an elderly care ward at the moment, so a lot of our

patients are not going to be well enough to go back to their own homes. Often, their families have been struggling to care for them at home.

Carers coming round up to four times a day are being cut back by councils (and because the private companies who supply the carers want to make their own savings).

So the next hour I spend assessing and writing up patients' needs and capabilities to try and get their care funded to go into a nursing home.

It's probably the most frustrating part of my job - usually the forms are sent back saying patients haven't met the criteria for funding.

## Patients' needs

One of the sisters on the ward said to me the other week that this wouldn't happen if nurses had control of the budgets, because they would understand the needs of the patients. But the government's plans will give more power to private companies and that will just make the situation even worse. I fax the paperwork off with my fingers crossed.

By now it's the start of the lunch-time drugs round. It always takes ages. The qualified nurses have so many different responsibilities that they are always being called away to deal with other things.

The sister I'm working with shows me how to give medications to patients dependant upon a nasogastric tube. I really like the opportunities to learn how to do new procedures - it's a reminder that we students are not just there to plug a gap in staffing levels at below minimum wage rates.

Then for my favourite part of the day, doing the basic observations - temperature, blood pressure and so on. I like doing it because you get another opportunity to chat to patients.



I get through my six patients then am called into a meeting to discuss all 27 patients, their medical condition, the next steps for them, and how we can secure funding if they need it.

These meetings are long, but I don't mind them. Out on the ward it seems like no one has a plan for any of the patients, but there is. A lot of the time we are battling against local councils and private care homes to secure patients a safe place where they will get the care that they need.

Finally I get a lunch break! Then come back, do an enema, change a leg dressing, remove a cannula, grab a couple of commodes here and there, look at my fob and it's dinnertime.

It's been a hectic afternoon. The housekeeping staff have had their hours reduced to save money, which has meant that support workers have to take on their responsibilities in the afternoons as well as their own.

After all the patients have been fed, I lend a hand to the support workers who are changing continence pads and turning patients to prevent them from getting bedsores.

Somewhere in the melee a patient was discharged, leaving a bed empty. At 19.15, the phone rings and I hear a familiar chirpy voice who says "Bed Bureau!" and my heart sinks.

We were to receive a new admission. She is a very old lady in the end stages of her life. A nurse brings her up to the ward and hands over to one of the registered nurses.

The woman's entire extended family are there and she is really in a bad way. She's unconscious, has pulled out her cannula and isn't clotting so the bed is a bloodbath. Between the two of us, we applied pressure to the wound and cleaned her up.

By 20.45, with all the paperwork for the new admission taken care of, it's home time, and only 15 minutes late. As I walk home, I know it's been a long day, but at the same time I can feel happy about all the people I have helped.

There's a lot wrong in the NHS today, and the ward staff are overworked, underpaid and under-appreciated.

I can't even picture what the ward will look like when the cuts really start to hit, but I still can't imagine doing anything else.

## The Work Programme: is it only chasing people off benefits?

**A job seeker**  
Coventry

I have been on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for 12 months. I finished education last year and have found it near impossible to find a job.

The Work Programme is defined on the government website for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) as "measures designed to help in the government's key aims of fighting poverty, supporting the most vulnerable and helping people break the cycle of benefit dependency."

I can tell you what it really means - those who are part of this programme are being pushed into working 30 hours a week to 'earn' their benefits or face losing them entirely.

The average job seeker claims around £200 a month. 30 hours a week on the minimum wage for an 18 year old (the earliest someone can sign on) would be £639.60 - so job seekers are expected to work for a third of what's supposed to be the legal minimum.

We have not in any way been told what these jobs will be or will include - just a vague "something that will help the community". We have no idea what the working conditions

will be, what training will be provided or what skills it will give us.

The hours of this community work are entirely non-negotiable. I

am taking part in courses and placements in Teaching Assistance. I would have to give this up in order to keep receiving benefits.

### March for Jobs!

This year is the 75th anniversary of the Jarrow crusade when 200 unemployed men marched from Jarrow in South Tyneside to London. Youth Fight for Jobs is marching to demand decent jobs with decent wages for all. We want real training opportunities, not slave labour schemes. Join us to say that workers and young people won't pay for the bosses' crisis!

**Merthyr march for jobs**  
Merthyr Tydfill to Cardiff 4-6 August

**Jarrow march for jobs**  
Jarrow to London  
5 October - 5 November

Get in touch to take part or help organise or raise money:

www.jarrowmarch11.com  
youthfightforjobs@gmail.com  
020 8558 7947



## Labour takes axe to Sure Start in Liverpool



Protesting against cuts to Sure Start in London

**Fred Dobie**  
Liverpool

On 14 July I attended a meeting of Liverpool city council's Education & Children's Services select committee which was discussing the closures of Sure Start centres in four areas of the city.

With a symphony of wringing hands, councillors peddled the word "heartbroken" as we sat ankle deep in crocodile tears. Heartfelt pleas from parents, users and staff in the public gallery underlined the excellence of the centres and their importance to both the areas they serve and the local economy.

There were also robust contribu-

tions pointing out the economic idiocy of training staff to be top of their game only to see them sucked into the private sector as cheap labour. Labour councillors were reminded, to applause and cheers from the public, that they were not elected to make cuts.

The collected evidence will now be scrutinised by the committee.

But, in a very telling development, a resolution was passed by our elected representatives, not condemning cuts outright as we might expect, but asking the ConDem government for four years in which to implement the cuts rather than two - a clear indication that Labour are willing to be axe wielders in the butchery!