

The NHS supports the creation of a new role in the independent sector

The need to cut waiting lists for NHS podiatry services in South Birmingham has led to the creation of the role of Nail Carer and subsequently to an accredited qualification, the Level 2 Award in Nail Cutting and Care.

The background

Driven by the need to reduce waiting times and provide a better service to those needing more complex care, South Birmingham NHS raised the threshold for access to its podiatry services, discharging more than 4,000 patients who simply required their nails cutting.

It was important to find a way to help these discharged patients get access to routine nail care, because good foot and nail health offers benefits including improved mobility and a reduced risk of falls in the elderly.

Through talking to patient groups representing older people across Birmingham, as well as GP Commissioning groups, NHS Commissioner Marion Rogerson identified the opportunity to create the role of Nail Carer, which could provide a routine, safe, affordable and accessible service to low-risk patients, but which would be based outside the NHS.



The outcomes

- through making a difficult decision to discharge low-risk patients, the NHS has helped to create a new role which is benefiting both the patients and the Nail Carers themselves.
- more than 120 people have completed the qualification so far.
- people such as nurses, beauticians, pharmacy technicians and care workers have been able to add Nail Caring as an extra qualification into their current role; and as a result have gained a transferable skill and added job satisfaction.
- independent Nail Carers have set up their own businesses and found clients. They are able to work flexibly – around childcare for example - and create their own income.
- an estimated 5,000 clients are registered with Nail Carers across Birmingham and many clients see a nail carer on average six times a year – much more often than they would have been able to access NHS podiatry services – at a time and place to suit them, and at an affordable cost.
- regular care reduces the likelihood of patients suffering pain or discomfort and may help decrease the risk of falls due to ill-fitting footwear. For some housebound individuals, it is also a welcome social occasion.

“Our patients’ welfare is of huge concern to us,” says Marion. “We want to be able to refer them to a service which, although not provided by the NHS, we can be confident is safe and effective, and less costly than a private podiatrist.”



“We couldn’t have achieved this without Skills for Health’s help in preparing the documentation, which was essential in ensuring that the Nail Carer qualification was applicable across the awarding bodies.”

Marion Rogerson
former South Birmingham CCG Commissioner –
responsible for cross city development

How they did it

South Birmingham NHS’s initial aim was to set up a course for Nail Carers which would train individuals to properly assess patients, refer them to a more specialist service if necessary, and cut and care for their nails. *“We wanted the course to have added value,”* says Marion, *“So people needed to be trained in providing health and safety advice too.”*

South Birmingham NHS Trust already had links with Birmingham Metropolitan College, and Marion made contact with the College’s Health and Beauty Associate Director Louise Lakin, who was keen to pursue the idea. Louise researched and planned the training modules, producing a course which met all of South Birmingham NHS’s requirements. The College was then able to award its own Certificate in Nail Care.

“We invested a lot of time, energy and resources in developing the role of Nail Carer,” says Marion. ***“We realised that it had potential to transfer across the UK, so we approached Skills for Health. We recognised their ability to make contact with awarding bodies, and to get the course on to a national agenda.”***

Skills for Health, in collaboration with stakeholders from South Birmingham PCT (now South Birmingham Central Clinical Commissioning Group), Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust and Birmingham Metropolitan College, created a Transferable Role Template for the Nail Carer role, listing the National Occupational Standards, career framework level and scope of the role which define it.

Skills for Health facilitated a meeting between the Birmingham stakeholders and Awarding Organisations (AOs), supporting the AOs to develop new units and work out a structure for the new qualification. It emerged as a Level 2 Award in Nail Cutting and Care, a 12 credit qualification on the QCF that became available to learners in November 2013*.

*Note: as of the date of publication, three Awarding Organisations (Agored, CIBTAC and ITEC) are offering the qualification and all enquiries relating to availability of the course should be directed to them.



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