

Clinical academic careers: what do I need to know?

Thinking of change of career in 2024. Over the year we will look at some of the alternatives to a clinical role, in wound care and beyond.

As 2024 begins many people will be considering career progression or a change in career. In fact, there will be some who have recently registered as a healthcare professional and may be thinking where do I want to be in 10 years' time.

Becoming a registered healthcare professional opens up a range of different career opportunities be it progression via a clinical, research or academia route. Working in academia offers a range of roles including lecturer, senior lecturer, principal lecturer, reader/associate professor and professor. All roles include research, teaching, administrative roles and personal development. Publications and presentations are essential to ensure research, new innovations and best practice is shared across professional groups and made accessible to the general public. The more focused research roles within a university will have less teaching commitments but there remains an expectation that all staff will teach and all teaching being underpinned by research.

Different universities will have slightly different essential criteria for undertaking an academic role. In most institutions all academics (lecturer, senior lecturer, principal lecturer) are expected to possess a master's qualification, teaching qualification and will have or will complete a doctoral qualification resulting in a PhD. For reader/associate professor or professor role the post holder will possess a PhD, will have a range of peer reviewed publications in high-quality journals and will be recognised as both national and international experts in their specialist area. The importance of high-quality research that impacts the end user is essential in a university environment and is recognised through the Research Excellence Framework (REF). REF is the UK's system for assessing excellence of research across all higher education providers, it assesses research culture, people and environment in sustainably supporting research excellence.

The role of clinical academics is becoming more popular allowing clinicians the ability to work seamlessly across academia and practice. Clinical academics are professionals who have a dual role that combines a clinical and research career, they have a joint

appointment between health and/or social care provider and an academic institution — they are able to both advance practice and improve care through research.

Having a joint role means the post holder is able to reflect the realities of clinical practice into research projects ensuring that appropriate studies are designed; multidisciplinary research teams are developed; studies are delivered in a timely manner and research funding is secured that meets clinical and academic needs. Following study completion the results/knowledge can be shared. Furthermore, based on the study data, changes can be implemented, which improve patient outcomes. The clinical academic role allows a range of clinicians an avenue by which they can enhance their research skills and experience, through encouraging and giving opportunities to others. For the clinical areas this builds the department's capacity to support research, while fostering a culture of improvement, engagement and adoption of innovation.

At an organisational level, the presence of clinical academics and their research makes departments exciting places to work, assisting with staff recruitment and retention. Their engagement with cutting-edge thinking and practice development allows departments to be early adopters of proven improvements. The publication of research allows the evidence to be adopted by healthcare systems around the world. By this route, the skills of clinical academics not only improve care in local settings but also allows for the improvement of care nationally and internationally. There is a growing body of evidence that greater research activity in healthcare provider organisations correlates with better health outcomes from those providers.

Successful clinical academics are naturally curious, resilient, and well-rehearsed in scientific methods, so they are in an ideal position to take ideas and test them to further medical/nursing knowledge. Clinical academics offer a rewarding career with great job satisfaction, so if you have a naturally enquiring mind why not consider starting your research journey?



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As healthcare continues to evolve it is important that we create a succession line of credible nursing leaders and researchers. The clinical academic route is one such way to support future leaders and to develop professors and associate professors within nursing. We must remember that the professorial role is multifactorial it encompasses the leading of research, advancing the evidence and ensuring that this underpins care interventions. Importantly a professor must support those who wish to undertake PhD study through supervision and examination. Becoming

a professor is often the pinnacle of a career so please consider:

- What area do you wish to 'profess' in
- Begin your PhD as soon as you can
- Publish and present your work

Importantly when you reach your goal support those who are at the beginning of their journey through supervising and examining PhDs, helping people develop their writing skills and sharing your own knowledge freely. ●

Key words

- Academic
- Career change
- Wound care