

You're hired! Karen successfully completes theatre assistant apprenticeship

Karen Haley is proof that you don't need to be a school leaver to be an apprentice at CPFT.

After working as a mechanical engineer for more than 20 years Karen retrained in accountancy and business studies, before deciding on a complete change of direction when she joined the Trust's podiatry team as an administrative assistant.

However, just six months into the post she applied for a theatre assistant apprenticeship when one became available in the teams surgery department.

Karen explained: "While I was an administrative assistant I asked if I could sit in on a few operations to better understand what my clinical colleagues were talking about, and to see how the detailed paperwork that I was producing came together. So when the opportunity arose for a theatre assistant apprenticeship I was encouraged to apply".



The apprenticeship scheme meant she enrolled on a two-year course with West Suffolk College in Bury St. Edmunds, which allowed her to study while continuing with her daily work routine. As well as producing a number of written assignments on topics such as infection control, policies and procedures, and theatre etiquette, Karen also secured a placement in the operating theatres at Peterborough City Hospital.

During her placement she gained hands-on experience of procedures being carried out under general anaesthetic which ranged from gall bladder removals, partial bowel and total thyroid removals, to hip, knee and shoulder replacements. She also worked in the podiatry day unit and the recovery department, where she prepared patients for surgery and assessed them afterwards in recovery, before helping to discharge them.

After completing her studies, Karen qualified as a theatre assistant, and now helps prepare and run the operating with the podiatric surgical team. Based at the Oaktree Centre in Huntingdon, the team carries out 'day surgery' under local anaesthetic for foot problems like bunions and hammer toes.

Karen said: "The best thing about my job is spending time with patients which is very rewarding. It's great to support them throughout their time with us – from the minute they arrive for surgery, to when we discharge them at the end of the day.

"You don't need to be young to be an apprentice. You just need to have the right attitude, be enthusiastic to learn, and remember you get out what you put in. I would really encourage people of any age to think about apprenticeships in the NHS."

Last year Karen gained a CPFT Pride award for her work with pathology and the surgery department after also training to be a phlebotomist, which involves taking blood from patients. She won recognition for setting up the collection and testing of blood and MRSA samples prior to surgery, which resulted in a quicker service being offered.

She has also recently been nominated for West Suffolk College's Apprentice of the Year 2018-19.

