

## CASE STUDY

### From surgical nursing to research-led care



Sofie Litsfeldt is a Staff Nurse at University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust, working on a surgical ward at Worthing Hospital, where she has supported patients for over a decade. Alongside her clinical role, Sofie has developed a strong interest in research, particularly in improving patient safety and postoperative care. Having previously completed a charity-funded research internship, she applied to the NIHR Health and Care Professionals Internship to build her research skills, expand her network, and gain experience in research delivery. Sofie hopes to combine her frontline nursing experience with research to improve outcomes for patients and support evidence-based practice in ward settings.

#### **tell us a little about your current role and what you enjoy most about your work?**

I am a staff nurse working on a surgical ward (Clapham ward, Worthing hospital). I've been on this Ward for 10 years and I really like it, I'm working close to the patients, always learn something new and no shift is the same. It is always busy and a wide variety of tasks. I work permanent night shifts, and we are a great team.

#### **What first inspired you to pursue a career in health and care? Tell us about your professional journey so far?**

I decided to train as a nurse straight after school, I didn't know much about the job itself, but I think it was a combination of an interest in the human body and wanting to do something useful.

I qualified in Sweden 18 years ago. After working in cardiology for a couple of years, I decided to work for an agency, and it was a great opportunity to try lots of different types of wards and settings. When I applied for a job in the NHS, I knew I wanted to work on a surgical ward, they had availability and I have been working there since then.

#### **What motivated you to apply for the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health and Care Professionals Internship?**

I have been wanting to get into research for a long time, but it can be quite hard to know where to start when you don't have a network, an understanding of the research landscape and knowledge about the opportunities that are out there. I have undertaken a year-long research



internship funded by the charity MyUHSussex and during this internship I have learnt so much and it confirmed that this is something I really want to do. The HCP internship sounded like the perfect opportunity to develop my skills further and expand my network.

**What areas of research or improvement in health and care are you most passionate about?**

I want to improve patient safety and outcomes, and I am particularly interested in postoperative care. There is so much potential for improvement, but we have to make sure the limited resources are used in the best way possible.

**Was there a particular moment or experience that sparked your interest in research?**

Yes, doing my bachelor's degree. I did a systematic review of non-pharmacological interventions to decrease postoperative nausea and vomiting. I enjoyed the whole process, from literature searching and reading articles, analysing and writing. The lessons on research methods were very useful and to be able to put my new research knowledge into use while learning more about a topic I was interested in was something I really enjoyed. I decided to do a master's degree related to research afterwards.

**Have you had any previous involvement in research or service improvement? What did you learn from it?**

I decided to do a project on medication safety during my previous internship. It was very hard trying to select what approach I was going to use, I wanted great results immediately. I definitely learned that it is important to spend a lot of time reading and getting an understanding of the subject first. I also learnt that it is important to gauge interest from others early on, especially if you are trying to do a quality improvement project and don't have any experience yourself.

**How do you see research complementing your day-to-day clinical or professional practice?**

I think being involved in research makes you look at your clinical practice in a different way – questioning our practice, what works and what we can do better. It is a good way to stay more up to date with the latest developments. Working close to patients and staff will also help identifying research questions that are meaningful.

**What skills do you hope to build or strengthen through research exposure?**

I would like to learn more about the process from identifying a research question to all the steps required in order to actually execute the research study. This includes for example organising PPIE sessions, ethical considerations, and writing a research protocol. I am hoping to be able to be exposed to a few different studies and study teams in different settings, to learn more.



**What do you hope to gain from the internship experience?**

More experience in research delivery as well as skills to design my own research. Hopefully the internship will lead to lots of new contacts and a better understanding of different types of research. Part of my internship will be spent shadowing research nurses in my local hospital, and I am planning to do a short placement in another area.

I am also hoping to gain more experience in publishing and presenting my work, I think sharing and engaging with others is a very important part of research.

**How do you plan to use the learning from the programme in your current role or service?**

I hope that I will be able to inspire my colleagues, not everyone wants to be actively involved in research of course, but to inspire an interest in staying up to date and using evidence-based care. I would also like to perform a service evaluation to spot opportunities for improved practice related to postoperative care.

**Are there specific types of projects or research areas you are particularly keen to explore?**

I am planning to put together a research question related to minimising postoperative complications. First, I will do a service evaluation looking at adherence to our postoperative procedures.

**How do you think this opportunity will support your professional development?**

It will be a great opportunity to get exposed to different types of research activities and to explore what a research career can look like.

I will have time to focus on disseminating a small literature review I did last year, submitting my abstract to conferences and to send in for publication. I will be able to take training, work on my own project and develop a strong research question.

**What difference do you hope your learning will make to patients, colleagues or your wider service?**

I am hoping that my research will improve postoperative outcomes for our patients. I think there is a lack of nurses working on wards undertaking research so I am hoping that my day-to-day experience will make a positive contribution when it comes to researching what matters to patients. Also from a staff point of view, any new intervention for example needs to be realistic.

**Looking ahead, how would you like your role in research or evidence-based practice to develop?**

My next big goal is that I would like to study for a PhD to gain the skills to be able to plan and lead research projects. In the future I would preferably be active in leading research, combined with my clinical role.

**What does being part of this internship programme mean to you personally?**

For the past few years, I have been working part-time and looking after my children, and while this has been great, I am excited to be at this stage of my life when I can focus a lot more on my career. So, this internship opportunity really came at the right time. Being accepted to the programme also gave me a massive confidence boost and I feel more motivated than ever to continue my research work.

**What do you find most exciting about taking this next step?**

For this internship, I'm particularly excited about creating new contacts and exploring research taking place in a variety of settings across the NIHR network.