

Health Education England (HEE) and NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) have been working across the North West to develop a new innovative endoscopy academy.

Gemma Norris is a Clinical Scientist and GI Physiology Service Lead at St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, has been supported by Health Education England to complete their Clinical Endoscopy Training programme. This is a 30-week programme which trains registered health professionals to perform safe diagnostic procedures in Upper or Lower GI Endoscopy.

“Clinical Scientists specialised in GI Physiology form a relatively small community. I was not aware of any scientific colleagues who had previously completed training within endoscopy and as such felt a responsibility to my Trust and to our patients; to appropriately demonstrate the clinical skills needed to ensure a high level of competence within this dual role. The demand for endoscopy within the UK continues to rise and I would urge other Trusts to consider utilising their GI physiology workforce to assist in the delivery of endoscopy services; particularly during the recovery phase of the pandemic. GI Physiologists have a high level of both anatomical and physiological knowledge. In addition to this, we regularly perform invasive, diagnostic procedures which require good technical and personal skills, which can be easily applied to the role of an endoscopist.

Initially, I was quite aware that my experience within acute patient management was somewhat limited; however, through the protected study time provided to me through the HEE course, I was able to arrange additional training and tailor this as appropriate to my needs. The academic teaching on the course was especially useful to underpin the practical elements of training and this was brought together regularly during meetings with my clinical supervisor. Since completing my endoscopy training I now feel more competent and confident as a clinician. I feel that I have further improved within my role as a GI Physiologist, and can provide patients with more detailed advice surrounding their diagnoses and further management. In addition to this, during endoscopic assessment, I have been able to identify patients whom are suitable for physiological investigation, and facilitate this referral swiftly. I feel that endoscopy training is a natural step in the professional development of GI Physiologists and I am extremely grateful to the Trust and to my clinical leads for providing me with the opportunity to take on this challenge. The assistance and encouragement of my colleagues was invaluable throughout my training and I was always made to feel comfortable and supported, both as a trainee and as a newly qualified endoscopist. This allowed me to grow in confidence and resulted in an extremely enjoyable training experience.

In the future, as my training progresses through HSST, I would like to further extend my skills to incorporate therapeutic endoscopy in addition to non-medical prescribing; if/when this becomes a possibility.”

Gemma Norris, Clinical Scientist and Upper GI Endoscopist, St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust



GI Physiologists undertake diagnostic investigations to confirm suspected functional disorder within the gut and to guide both the medical and surgical management of patients. This contributes significantly to the care pathway of patients who may have oesophageal motility disorders, severe gastroesophageal reflux disease, chronic constipation and faecal incontinence.

Gemma Norris is a Clinical Scientist by registration and initially trained as a Biomedical Scientist. Following her training, Gemma wished to pursue more of a patient-facing role and so applied for the Scientist Training Programme (STP), obtaining a place within the specialism of GI Physiology.

The Scientist training programme is a 3 year training scheme, provided by the National School of Healthcare Science. The programme incorporates work-based training, supported by a university-accredited Master's degree, to promote a high level of both academic and professional competence.

Following completion of the STP in 2015, Gemma began working as a Band 7 Clinical Scientist, within a small GI Physiology unit. Through professional networking within this role, she was able to provide advice and support to St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, which enabled them to establish their own in-house GI Physiology service, providing specialist diagnostic investigations including:

- Oesophageal manometry
- Ambulatory 24hr pH/impedance studies
- Anorectal manometry
- Small bowel capsule endoscopy
- Patency capsule
- Cytosponge.

In 2018, Gemma was successful in obtaining her current position as a Clinical Scientist and GI Physiology Service Lead at St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.