

Nursing Times

'We're there for our patients through all stages of life'

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Teesside specialist nurse Claire Naisbitt tells **Nicole Friedberg** why she thinks working with multiple sclerosis patients represents a unique career opportunity

Approximately 2,000 patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) in Teesside have access to the expert care that can be provided by a specialist nurse – thanks in part to the advice of a grandad.

One of 300 MS nurses around the UK, Claire Naisbitt joined two specialist colleagues at The James Cook University Hospital last November, following fundraising efforts by the MS Trust.

The charity conducts regular research into nursing levels across the UK and has found around two-thirds of people with MS in the UK live in areas where there are not enough MS nurses.

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which runs James Cook, has become the latest to benefit from the charity's pioneering specialist nurse programme to help patients with MS.

Ms Naisbitt has previously worked as a nurse on an acute neurology ward and in the community but is really looking forward to taking part in the programme and a new stage in her career.

When she was only 14 years old, Ms Naisbitt's grandfather was diagnosed with lung cancer. Along with her mother and aunt, she helped look after him.

"I didn't want to be a nurse at this point, but my grandad always said 'You should be a nurse. You're a lovely girl, why don't you be a nurse?'

So then, when he passed away, I made it my aim to be a nurse for him," said Ms Naisbitt.

While she did not go into nursing specifically to pursue neurology, it all worked out quite serendipitously when Ms Naisbitt saw adverts for neurology when she first qualified for jobs. "I found it really interesting and then got the job in neurology at James Cook," she said.

On a day-to-day basis, Ms Naisbitt, wears many hats as an MS nurse, noting "we do clinics in the outpatient department where we see patients who need disease-modifying treatments and we manage those patients and we see patients who have progressive illness".

She added that they used many communication methods to keep in contact. "We do a telephone consultation line as well, where the patients can ring and speak to us about any issues they might have," she said. "They also have access to our emails, so we can email the patients of any concerns they may have."

As an MS nurse, Ms Naisbitt highlighted that she had the unique opportunity to have a long relationship with her patients.

"We're with the patients from diagnosis," she said. "So, we're with them when they go through marriage, when they have their babies.

"We're there through all stages of life. And we might know the patient for many years and I think that kind of separates us from other specialist nurses who might only get kind of a glimpse of the patients," she said.

In addition to healthcare, Ms Naisbitt provides emotional support and education to her patients.

"We're there to support the patient to come to terms with their illness and be with them through all aspects of their care needs," she said. "We act as educational support – we're wanting the patient to look after themselves so that they can live their life to the best of their ability."

In general, Ms Naisbitt said she was "looking at the patient holistically – so anything the patient might need, we can help with", including referrals to other specialists if they need.

Since the job can be quite a lot to handle emotionally, Ms Naisbitt highlighted that she had a system for her own self-care.

"It's important to talk to colleagues about any issues you have," she said. "Certain patients you feel like you might take home with you, but it's just chatting with your colleagues... having a debrief with your colleagues before you go home – that's how I kind of deal with it emotionally. And then at home I'm just me, I'm just Claire. I'm not a nurse at home."

While being a specialist herself, Ms Naisbitt highlighted her deep respect for all her colleagues in the nursing profession.

"I think all nurses go above and beyond for their patients; they stay back after work, they do small things to help the patients. And they're the patients' advocates – they're always there for them," she said.