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CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR CURRENT ROLE AND HOW YOU CAN HELP PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CANCER?

I'm a staff nurse on a busy 10-bedded inpatient unit. I've been in this role now as a qualified nurse for eight years and work with haematology and oncology patients, and that would involve perhaps a diagnosis of cancer leading to treatment, such as chemotherapy, blood transfusions, and dealing with symptom control.

HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK IN THE ONCOLOGY FIELD?

I started work at Salisbury District Hospital in 1996, where I was an auxiliary and then became a healthcare support worker, and spent quite a lot of my time working on medical oncology, which later then became a dedicated unit for cancer which I transferred to. Became really interested in cancer, liked the nursing and the people that I was meeting and then decided to continue into my training.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO WORK IN AN AREA THAT MANY PEOPLE WOULD THINK IS REALLY CHALLENGING OR HARD?

Well, it can be challenging and hard, but I think what attracted me to the nursing was the people. Contrary to what people may think about cancer nursing but you meet some really fabulous people going through really difficult times and they seem to cope really well, which is quite amazing.

HOW DO YOU THINK YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Well I hope that people like me to begin with and that my work does actually help make a big difference in people's lives. Although I do give chemotherapy, it can make people extremely poorly. But at least when somebody is diagnosed and they're given treatment, it is a positive way forward and people can start looking to the future. So I would hope that I'm a happy and well-liked nurse. I seem to get on well with people and that relationship is really important in my work.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU CAME TO STUDY AT THE OU?

I was given the opportunity by the hospital. It was suggested that I might like to apply for the course. I didn't actually know that we were doing training through the Open University at the time, so I applied and very luckily I got a place with another 15 students. So there were 16 of us that started in 2004.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE SUPPORT OF YOUR EMPLOYER?

It was very important that my employer supported what I was doing. I was currently working as a healthcare support worker on the ward and it became a little bit confusing because I would appear as a student on the ward, I would appear as a healthcare support worker on the ward, so my role became confusing, and so it was vital that everybody knew exactly what I was doing and I needed the support from the team really whilst I was training.

HOW HAS STUDYING WITH THE OU PREPARED YOU FOR WORK IN THE ONCOLOGY FIELD?

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Well, I think the nursing with the Open University would have prepared me to work in any field of nursing, basically, and you need a good solid foundation of basic care skills, etc. and that prepared me.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO STUDY WITH THE OU?

Well, I'd ask them why they wanted to study with the Open University and the advice I would share with them is the reason why I studied with the Open University was because it suited my lifestyle: It was freedom. It meant that I could carry on a very busy hectic lifestyle away from the environment and study as well. I studied at home, which was great. It meant that I didn't have any set times to study. It meant that I could get out with the dogs in the morning and then come back and pick up my work. The only thing I would say is that, as flexible as it was when I was studying with the Open University, you do need to be committed and there will be deadlines to meet.

[End of interview]