

Training routes into healthcare science

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Summary

The healthcare science workforce plays an integral part in the delivery of equipment services across the UK. However, the career path is unclear and not well-publicised, making recruitment into this specialist field challenging. It is hoped to be made more accessible by clarifying terminology and training routes.

Aims & Objectives

The aim of this poster is to clarify routes into the healthcare science professions by collating up-to-date information from a variety of different sources. The aim of this work is to offer an easy-to-understand reference guide for employers looking to provide training opportunities, and for students or employees in the NHS looking to enter the professions.

Background

The National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) was established in October 2011 to support the implementation and delivery of the new healthcare science education and training programmes. The aim was to establish a single training route into a complex and diverse array of careers in healthcare science. Healthcare scientists work in four main areas in the NHS - life sciences, physiological sciences, physical sciences and clinical engineering, and bioinformatics. Within posture, mobility and equipment services the healthcare scientists are typically from clinical engineering and specialising in rehabilitation engineering. The Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM) previously accredited the training course for clinical scientists working in clinical engineering; this is now done via the NSHCS Scientist Training Programme (STP) route.

Clinical scientists are regulated by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC). IPEM also continue to offer a training scheme for clinical technologists, which provides formal clinical technologist training and a means to achieve registration on the Register of Clinical Technologists (RCT). This training can also be completed via the NSHCS Practitioner Training Programme (PTP), completion of the scheme leading to the title Healthcare Science Practitioner, and registration onto the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) for Health and Social Care. There is also a training route to become a healthcare science associate or assistant, often known as a technician. These roles can be obtained via the apprenticeship scheme, and offer college study alongside workplace learning. Training centres need to be aware of all the routes of training, and which may be the best route for an individual, in order to be able to workforce plan and encourage a diverse healthcare science workforce for the future.

Discussion

Despite the NSHCS introducing Modernising Scientific Careers (MSC) in 2011, there remains some lack of clarity with regards to training routes into various different schemes, what counts as equivalence and how career progression is achieved. Even the terminology used within the professions varies: is a healthcare scientist the same as a clinical scientist?; is a rehabilitation engineer the same as a clinical technologist or a healthcare science practitioner?

If people within the profession remain unclear, how are we likely to encourage the next generation of scientists and engineers to engage, and begin their journey along this career path.

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