

NHS FINANCE CAREER STORIES

SUCCESSFUL MOVES BETWEEN NHS SECTORS



CAREER STORY

WONU OGUNLELA

HEAD OF PMO AT EPSOM AND ST. HELIER UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS



INTRODUCTION

Having completed University in Nigeria, Wonu decided to move to the UK to apply for accountancy roles to be with her mother and sister. Wonu's mother worked for the NHS and when Wonu wasn't having much success in applying for roles, her mother suggested trying voluntary work in the NHS to gain some experience. It has now been 17 years since that first volunteering role in administration at Central Middlesex Hospital, and Wonu is now an ACCA qualified accountant heading up the PMO team at Epsom and St. Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. In those 17 years Wonu has worked in Acute and Mental Health providers as well as national and regional regulator roles giving her a wide breadth of experience. Whilst moving from different parts of the NHS can be a challenge and a bit daunting at times, Wonu believes that we should dispel the myths around it being too difficult and inaccessible *'at the end of the day we are all working towards the same thing which is the best outcomes for patients.'*

CAREER PATH TO DATE

Looking back to the start of Wonu's NHS career, she was studying her accountancy qualification whilst working in an administration based, patient-facing voluntary role. Two weeks into this role her manager asked Wonu if she would like to take on a part time paid role within the team. Whilst Wonu accepted the offer she planned for this to be for a short time whilst she was looking for entry level finance roles. Shortly after this there was a restructure in the team and Wonu moved to Northwick Park to work in a different team. Despite still really wanting a finance role Wonu decided to do an NVQ qualification in administration to try and help progress her career. Wonu then decided she would like to find a full-time role and successfully applied for one at another trust. On delivering this news to her current managers they offered her a full-time role, *'they didn't want to let me go until I found a finance role as they were aware that that was the ultimate goal'*. That same day the paperwork was sorted and Wonu had her first full-time role in the NHS.

Once Wonu had her full-time role in the NHS and had gained some useful experience she started to apply for finance trainee roles. Having been told she was unsuccessful for the Band 4 role as Accounts Assistant Manager, Wonu was surprised and delighted to hear she had been offered a band 5 finance trainee role at Ealing Hospital. This was her first training role for three years covering financial planning, management accounts and financial control. Wonu started off in financial planning which involved contracting, service line reporting and PLICS. The Trust's Finance Director at the time was very supportive and encouraging of his team to get involved with HFMA and Finance Skills Development; he saw the importance of networks and training which was passed on to staff.

The first rotation in this trainee role involved working with commissioners, invoicing, and learning about Payment by Results. Wonu really enjoyed this role as it involved getting into the detail to cost everything up and see how things work operationally. Next up was management accounts and after six months Wonu decided it was time for a move and started a band 6 role in management accounts at Epsom and St. Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, whilst studying for her accountancy qualification.



Wonu achieved her ACCA accountancy qualification in 2011, and whilst she thought this might be a good opportunity to look for a band 7 role, she had her first child so did not want to move organisations at this point. On returning from maternity, Wonu started looking for new opportunities and moved to Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS FT as a Deputy Finance Manager. This was her first role in a Mental Health organisation having only ever worked in Acute providers previously. *'The whole dynamics are different in the way they operate, the structure is very different to acute, different terminologies, different inpatient structures, but the principles are the same.'* Wonu found this a really interesting role to learn how Mental Health services work, working with commissioners was different and Mental Health does not work on Payment by Results so there was much to learn. *'Although the structures are very different, no matter what type of provider you are in you are trying to achieve the same thing.'* Wonu stayed in this role for three years and really believes that anyone can move across the different NHS organisations throughout their career.

When Wonu returned from maternity for a second time, she decided to do a sideways move back to Epsom and St. Helier to get into the PMO world. *'I didn't mind doing a sideways move to learn something new, PMO is about supporting effectiveness and efficiencies in the organisation which is really interesting to me.'* Wonu led a scheme on centralised cost controls; this was an exciting project for Wonu as it gave her a really good overview of the different functions in the organisation. After just over a year in this role Wonu started to think about her next career move and a role at NHS Improvement, as it was known at the time, came up in sector reporting. At this stage Wonu wasn't sure whether she was right for this role at a regulatory body as she had not worked in one before but after reading the job description, she felt her skill set and experience would complement the role and so she applied, to which she was offered the job.

Despite having only worked in the provider sector at this point, Wonu was able to use this knowledge to help her be successful in this role. Using her provider experience, Wonu worked to improve a process for the provider finance returns which were reported to the CFO., making it more user friendly. Wonu spent two and a half years in this role before deciding it was time for a new challenge;

'when it comes to roles, I always asks myself, how much am I contributing, how much am I developing myself, how much am I challenging myself.'



Wonu's next role was for the London region's NHS England and NHS Improvement team where she was a senior finance manager working in assurance. Here she worked with the national team and NHS providers which was a great role for Wonu as she could draw on her previous experiences and learnings from all her previous roles. She knew the right questions to ask and had already built some professional relationships which is important in any NHS finance role. Wonu then got an opportunity to act up into a Senior Finance Lead role after for 2 years of working in the region at NHS England before moving back to Epsom and St. Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Now back at this trust for a third time, Wonu is heading up the PMO team and has only been there a matter of weeks. With her wide breadth of experience and learnings from her previous roles and having worked in the current team previously she felt that this role would be a good move and a challenging one.

REFLECTIONS

When reflecting on her previous roles, Wonu expresses how much she has enjoyed each of them and has built up and learnt new skills and has had exposure to different experiences. As a trainee she enjoyed building up the PLICS System and having the opportunity to work with operational colleagues. Learning how a hospital is ran operationally and gaining exposure into the detail of this was really interesting for Wonu.

Whilst working in Mental Health, she really enjoyed her role in managing patient funding and working with commissioners to make sure patients were getting the right level of care, *'being able to unblock the funding for patients was really rewarding'*.

In the National role at NHS Improvement, Wonu really enjoyed helping to make the provider reporting process work successfully in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Working at regulator regional level, she loved the variety of the role as the day could start with business case reviews and then move on to planning, then monthly reporting.

Wonu says she has enjoyed every one of her roles, and that the most rewarding aspect of working in NHS finance is contributing towards the delivery of high quality care to patients. Wonu expresses that this value is at the heart of everything she does in each of her roles.

CHALLENGES

Regardless of how long you have been in the NHS, acronyms are always a challenge. Wonu advises not to be afraid to ask questions.

ADVICE TO OTHERS

If you are thinking about moving to different organisations, Wonu advises that building relationships is really important.

'When starting a new organisation, it is important for new starters to know who the key people and key contacts are. Establishing this from the beginning can solve a lot of problems.'

Build up your networks. Wonu still has a group of friends who initially met as trainees, who are very encouraging of each other's careers. Wonu is also part of the Sponsorship programme and is supported by her Sponsor who she often shadows at work and meets with on a regular basis. The Sponsee network has also been useful in sharing experiences with others. Although Wonu has no formal mentors currently she has many informal ones who she speaks to regularly.

When starting a new organisation, *'an overview of how finances work in the organisation is really helpful, what are the organisation's sources of funding, where the organisation is and where it hopes to be. What are the key things happening at the moment for that organisation.'*

THE BEST THING ABOUT WORKING IN NHS FINANCE

'Fulfilment – how the job I do influences patient care. Being able to do something I am passionate about.'



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If you have any questions on any of the above or would like any further information, then please get in touch with the team at one.finance@nhs.net

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