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CAREER JOURNEY

I am currently a Senior Finance Business Partner at the George Eliot Hospital, overseeing the Medicine and Urgent & Emergency Care Directorates. I always knew that I wanted an apprenticeship following my A-Levels, with finance being a career where University isn't the only route you can take as I wanted more hands-on experience whilst also learning and studying. During my apprenticeship, I studied AAT gaining Level 4 qualification, following this I decided that I wanted to continue by studies with CIMA which I completed in 2020 and gaining my registration in 2021 following the submission of the Practical Experience.

I have been fortunate to be able to progress within my career at the George Eliot over the last 10.5 years. I have been in many roles within the finance department starting as an apprentice across Financial Accounts and Financial Management before being appointed into permanent roles in Financial Management. These roles include Senior Finance Assistant which was more of a central role supporting the team and gaining budget management experience, Finance and Performance Analyst supporting 2 clinical directorates in all aspects of financial management. The opportunity then arose to work in the Reporting and Development Business Partner role which was a more strategic and trust overview post and then Finance Business Partner supporting with the clinical directorates before securing a promotion into my current role.

When I first looked at a finance career, I must admit the NHS didn't first come to mind as like many others you think of the clinical roles, but it has been one of the best decisions I have made to start my career in the NHS. Being new into my finance career, I wasn't sure what to expect apart from that this would be an interesting and versatile career path. Which I confirm has been the case for myself with the different roles and wide scope of involvement and interaction with the clinical and operational teams.

A day in NHS financial management is varied and can change dependent on demand, apart from our fixed month end financial reporting, it otherwise usually involves the below but on a range of different topics:

- Working alongside the operational and clinical colleagues to deliver the financial plan, being that critical friend in their decision making.
- Working on costings and supporting on business cases and service developments by providing support but challenges where required.
- Savings schemes costings
- Closing out the month end financial position and completing executive reports
- Supporting the development of the financial management team

I really enjoy the varied aspect of the role of being involved in a variety of different meetings/developments and liaising with the directorate colleagues. This has allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the services provided and the challenges the team face and how finance can support them in overcoming these. To help provide better quality care for our patients, along with building relationships with the teams to allow for better collaboration and knowing that we are all making a difference to patient care.

There are always many challenges in the NHS and finance and through the years the challenges have changed as I have gained experience. As I started in my career in finance I think one of the main challenges was understanding the terminology and acronyms used within the wider trust and clinical teams; which was quickly overcome by asking questions and clarification on the terminology. Further into my career the challenges are now more around balancing the finances with performance, quality and safety, the 3-legged stool as we call it at GEH. With tighter funds and increasing demands on the services and backlogs from the Covid pandemic, this is an ongoing challenge not just for us but for all NHS trust. Through my role in finance, it is about being that critical friend and prioritising items with the directorates on what we want to focus on first, providing that insight from a financial perspective but also understanding the operational and clinical needs and trying to balance these together.

As with any job balancing work and home life is key but not always that easy. The NHS is flexible in being able to support this given that both sides are willing to be flexible and have a bit of give and take. There as with anywhere, be times where you go through peaks and troughs of busy periods such as month end, planning rounds and year end. As long as you manage your time, workload and work together as a team it is manageable to keep a work life balance, its all about being open and work together. I try to do this with my horse riding every other Friday where I manage my workload in the week to ensure I finish on time to make it to my lessons, if there is an issue I will raise this up and work on a way that works both ways.

In terms of what's next for me, I am going to build upon my experience and knowledge gained so far to support my directorates to provide efficient and excellent patient care. I would advise for anyone who wishes to start a finance career in the NHS to do it!