

Learning Disability Nurse

Learning disability nurses help people with learning disabilities to live their lives as independently as possible. Their patients, usually called clients, can be children or adults.

The work of learning disability nurses varies between clients, but can include:



- working with other professionals to assess a client's needs, then devising a care plan for the client
- training clients to live independently - including personal hygiene, dressing, learning how to use public transport, how to go shopping, simple budgeting, encouraging clients to socialise, or providing support in their working and family life
- helping to assess the problems faced by clients who have additional mental or physical problems, such as recurring fits, speech, vision or hearing problems
- supporting clients' families or carers - this might involve arranging temporary care for a client, so the carer can have a break
- acting on behalf of their clients and representing their interests in certain situations
- group work in areas such as healthy living, or managing anxiety or aggression.

Nurses work with other healthcare professionals such as doctors, health visitors, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and healthcare assistants. They may also work with social workers, teachers and employers.

Most work takes place in the community, in patients' homes, special schools, day centres and residential homes. Some work takes place with clients in hospitals. To help clients become more independent, nurses may spend time on buses and trains, and in shops, restaurants, sports facilities, workplaces and holiday centres. Nurses work 37.5 hours a week, but patterns of work vary. Those working in hospitals and residential care may work evenings, nights, weekends and bank holidays on shifts. Most community work tends to take place during the day. Overtime, part-time work and flexible hours are often available.

Salaries in the National Health Service (NHS) range from around £18,114 a year for a newly-qualified nurse, to over £50,000 a year for a nurse consultant. Nurses earn extra for overtime, shifts, being on call and if they work in or near London. Learning disability nurses should:

- be patient, compassionate and sensitive
- have good communication and teaching skills
- work well alone and as part of a team
- have physical and mental stamina.

Most learning disability nurses work for the NHS. Others work in the private sector and, increasingly, in local authority learning disability teams.

Nursing students study towards a degree or a diploma course, or a postgraduate course if they already have a degree. The course starts with a year-long Common Foundation Programme, covering the basic principles of nursing. Students then go on to do a specific programme in learning disability nursing. They usually have to decide which branch of nursing they wish to specialise in at the beginning of the course. For more general information about becoming a nurse, see **Nurse**. On completing their course, learning disability nurses must register with the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC).

Experienced learning disability nurses can progress to become community learning disability nurses, team leaders, charge nurses and, eventually, nurse consultants. They can train to work in other branches of nursing - adult, child or mental health - or become school nurses, public health nurses, health visitors or midwives.