

Yasthira Singh

Band 5 Dietitian
St Andrews Healthcare



My current role

I am a band 5 dietitian working in St. Andrews Healthcare in Northampton. I have been a registered dietitian abroad for the past 4 years.

My route into Mental Health

I have a BSc in Dietetics and Nutrition with Honours from the University of the Western Cape (South Africa). After graduating from university, it is mandatory for South African residents to complete a year of 'community service', whereby we serve the government hospitals and serve the community. I have had three years of experience within an acute setting, especially in the Intensive care unit (ICU) and general wards which covered renal diseases, liver disease, diabetes, hypertension, and cholesterol and weight management. I have also worked in a physical rehabilitation centre that consisted of patients with brain injuries and cancer patients.

In my first year as a newly qualified dietitian, I was fortunate enough to shadow my lead dietitian in the eating disorder unit. I had the privilege of overseeing two patients with eating disorders (anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa) and working with these two very unique patients sparked my interest in mental health.

I have recently been on training by the BDA on Assessing Capacity, which I found very insightful and have done a Behaviour change course. I also took it upon myself to complete an eating disorder course to better understand how to provide the best care for my patients.

What does a typical day look like in my role?

A band 5 dietitian is typically patient facing. I am a full time dietitian and I have a caseload of patients which I manage. I am currently doing my preceptorship and this requires me to get involved in non-clinical aspects, which involves updating guidelines for patients and staff, doing audits, delivering PEG training to staff, amongst others.

At St Andrews, we work within a multidisciplinary team that consists of Doctors, Registered Clinicians, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Nursing team, Health care assistants, Occupational Therapy Technical instructors, Dietetics, Speech and language therapists, Physiotherapists, physical health care team.

"Something that I am most proud of in my role is making a difference to people's lives."

My experience moving to the UK to practice as a dietitian

My overall experience moving to the UK from South Africa was very exciting but simultaneously daunting. I moved over alone and had no family in the UK, however, the team made me feel very welcomed.

Positives of moving to the UK

I have gained so much invaluable experience over the last 10 months. I am grateful for getting the opportunity to learn more about mental health in greater detail and I have been fortunate enough to go on BDA training days, training within the department and been involved in updating the first line guidance with my colleague for the charity. My team is amazing, dynamic and supportive and their knowledge is indispensable.

Things I've adapted to

In South Africa, I worked in an acute private hospital and most of my work was a split between ICU and education. In an acute hospital, patient turnover is rapid, whilst in the UK, working within a mental health setting, the patients are usually with us for a long time. This was initially a challenge for me as it took me a bit of time to realise that I did not need to see my patients every day, and a longer review date would be appropriate (similar to community settings).

What advice would you offer?

My advice would be similar to that of Nike, 'Do it'. If you are not sure if you should do something different (out of your comfort zone) in a particular area, I would say, do it. This has been the best experience for me and I have gained invaluable knowledge and skills. Any experience is good experience, as there is always something that you can learn from it.

“Working in a long term setting is rewarding, as you can see the differences or changes you make in your patient and you are on this journey with them. “

