

Allied Health Students:  
leading the way



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The Council of Deans of Health represents the UK's university faculties engaged in education and research for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. At any one time our members will be educating in the region of 120,000 future registered health professionals. Operating as a multi-professional organisation at the heart of policy and political debate, the Council aims to lead policy at national and UK level, promoting the essential contribution of our members to health and social care.

The Burdett Trust for Nursing is an independent charitable trust named after Sir Henry Burdett KCB, the founder of the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses (RNPFN). The Trust was set up in 2002 in recognition of the foundation, philosophy and structure of the RNPFN. The Trust makes grants in support of nurse-led projects, using its funds to empower nurses and make significant improvements to the patient care environment.





# Introduction

These are the stories of 11 students from 11 health professions. They have all come from different backgrounds and life experiences that have taken them to this point in their lives but are now excelling and leading as students in their professions.

The students featured in this publication have all taken part in the Student Leadership Programme. The Student Leadership Programme, now popularly known as #150Leaders, has been delivered by the Council of Deans of Health, supported by the Burdett Trust for Nursing, since 2017. The programme has so far offered leadership development to over 250 students from across the UK and from nursing, midwifery and allied health disciplines. Students participate in a year-long leadership training programme with conferences, workshops, one-to-one coaching and an online community of leadership practice.

We hope these student stories will inspire others to consider a career in an allied health profession, as well as illustrate just a few examples of the work allied health professions undertake. Leadership exists at all levels in the sector, and features in their day-to-day roles to support patients and clients, and improve practice more widely.

We would like to acknowledge Health Education England's ongoing collaboration with the Council and their support for AHP student leadership.

# Dietetics

## Alison Booker

Leeds Beckett University

### What does it mean to be a dietitian?

Dietitians are “qualified and regulated health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems at an individual and wider public-health level.” – British Dietetic Association (BDA). As a student dietitian, I have completed placements within the NHS and the military and have seen how dietitians use their passion and expertise for nutrition to support others in a variety of clinical, public health and wider dietetic fields. I am very proud to be a small part of that!

### As a student dietitian, what leadership roles did you undertake?

I have acted as a student representative for my cohort at university and earlier this year, I was elected as the national student representative for the British Dietetic Association. Both roles have been fantastic for inspiring fellow students to share their voice and I feel extremely privileged to be able to support my peers both at university and across the UK. I applied for both positions not truly believing I would be successful, so my message to others is that you should always believe in yourself. If you see an opportunity, go for it! You never know what you might achieve and where it may lead.

### What is the value of leadership as a student and professional dietitian?

I always used to believe that leadership was the domain of those with position, rank or title, but as I have progressed as a student dietitian, I have come to realise that we all have the power to be leaders; to lead by example and to inspire change at every level for the benefit of our service-users, colleagues and the profession.



In fact, the concept of leadership features in our Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency, which means all dietetic students have a responsibility to develop and flourish into the leaders of the future. I think this is more relevant now than ever before; we should be prepared to step up as nutrition leaders to combat the social-media pseudo-science of our time and rise to the challenge of increasing non-communicable diseases that require dietetic intervention.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other student dietitians who aspire to a leadership role?

I never considered myself to be a leader in the past because I always felt that I was “just a student”. However, when I challenged my own limiting beliefs, I was empowered and driven to put myself forward for new opportunities. My advice to other dietetics students would be to remember that none of us are “just” anything – **we all have something to offer, we are all shaped by our life experiences and we all have the power to inspire change and to be successful in our pursuit to achieve our goals.**



# Occupational therapy

**Nhu Milton**

**Plymouth University**

## **What does it mean to be an occupational therapist?**

The term “occupation” refers to the activities of daily living that an individual needs, wants, or has to do, such as eating, cooking, doing paid work, etc. Occupational therapists aim to support their clients to engage in these meaningful occupations.

## **As a student occupational therapist, what leadership roles did you undertake?**

My definition of a leader is someone who takes initiative to make a positive change. As a student, I am conducting a systematic review on older adults’ experience of intimacy-related occupations. Passionate about this study, I have delivered presentations at two research conferences. I was elected as Vice-Chair of my university’s Occupational Therapy Society. In this role, I was able to secure funding to enable our members to attend the annual Occupational Therapy Show. We also organised a number of social events, including a rock painting session because occupational therapy rocks(!).

I’m Vietnamese, and I returned to Vietnam to work with children who were deprived of opportunities to engage in meaningful occupations.

I was able to facilitate a number of activities, namely making Asian bubble tea, shaping play dough, building sandcastles, making origami sea creatures, and watching age-appropriate English movies. What surprised me the most was my ability to fundraise; though I had never tried it, I raised more than £650 from 15 generous donors. The funding allowed me to take my students to the dentist and enabled my students to go to Lao Chai – Ta Van which helped them to expand their horizons and explore their career of interest in depth.



## **What is the value of leadership as a student and professional occupational therapist?**

It is vital that students enter the health and care workforce with a genuine willingness to improve their area of practice and experience in working with diverse colleagues. From day one of their professional careers, newly qualified professionals should have the confidence, the knowledge, the skills and the practical tools to lead change and improve practice, no matter what stage of their career they are at.

## **ADVICE**

### **What is your advice to other occupational therapy students who aspire to a leadership role?**

Identify the positive change you wish to make and do it. Get a supportive group or team around you, **find a mentor to help you and make it happen!**

# Operating department practice

**Victoria Hain**

University of Leicester

## Tell us about your profession and what it means to be an operating department practitioner

Operating department practitioners (ODPs) are the Allied Health Professionals that look after the patients during their perioperative journey. They provide skilled care and support in anaesthetics, surgery and recovery, meaning that the daily job can be unpredictable and varied. As skilled healthcare professionals, ODPs are also in demand outside of the operating department in areas such as A&E, critical care, clinics or on specialist pre-hospital teams.

## As a student operating department practitioner, what leadership roles did you undertake?

Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the operating department, it is essential that an ODP has excellent teamworking skills. As students, we spend 65% of our time on placement and are constantly developing our teamwork. The opportunity to really explore the leadership culture in the NHS and to see the huge scope of leadership options available to the Allied Health Professions came when I was very lucky to gain a place on the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme. Through this programme,

I have gained an understanding of how the wider NHS functions, plans and implements improvements by attending working groups at various levels of related arm's length organisations. I have been working with Health Education England to encourage former military service personnel to consider careers in healthcare. This is an area I'm passionate about and will continue to work on after I qualify.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional operating department practitioner?

ODPs are essential to patients' perioperative journey, which can be the most vulnerable time for any patient. Leadership skills for an ODP are essential for ensuring patient safety. They help the ODP work within the multidisciplinary team on a daily basis to provide high standards of safe care for the patient. With experience, the ODP can also employ their leadership skills into research, practice development or management to help support the wider development and running of patient services.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other operating department practitioner students who aspire to a leadership role?

**Say yes to every new experience! Sometimes things might not go perfectly, but the experience will be valuable in some way.**

Apply for leadership programmes, seek out new opportunities, attend conferences (especially ones that cover more than just the perioperative environment – they will inspire you and maybe make you think about things differently). Reflect on your personality, skillset and interests, then develop and employ these to the benefit of the patient, the wider NHS and yourself!



# Orthoptics

**Charlotte Smith**  
The University of Sheffield

## What does it mean to be an orthoptist?

An orthoptist diagnoses and treats problems affecting the muscles around the eye and the parts of the brain that control these muscles. Based in hospitals, orthoptists mainly deal with paediatric patients to ensure vision develops normally or adult patients complaining of double vision. An orthoptist works as part of a multidisciplinary team alongside optometrists and ophthalmologists well as working autonomously, making their own diagnoses and treatment plans.

## As a student orthoptist, what leadership roles did you undertake?

During my studies at university, one of the leadership roles I took on was President of the Orthoptic Student Society. This opportunity helped me to work on my time management skills and teamwork to balance my responsibilities.

Another opportunity that I accepted was the chance to experience how orthoptics was practised and taught abroad, offered through my university. As part of the Global Engagement Programme, I took a large step outside my comfort zone and travelled to Sweden alone to directly observe orthoptic practice internationally in St Erik Eye Hospital, Stockholm, and Västerås Central Hospital.

I was part of the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme. I learnt a great deal from this programme, such as that leadership comes in many different forms and how to actively listen to experienced individuals for my own personal development.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional orthoptist?

An orthoptist works autonomously, managing their own patients and deciding on the best course of treatments. It is vital an orthoptist can explain their management plans effectively with good communication, a skill any good leader should possess. As part of a multidisciplinary team, orthoptists are also often the first healthcare professional a patient will see. Leadership provides orthoptists with the confidence to put patients at ease when necessary and to make important decisions regarding whether a patient needs to be referred to an ophthalmology consultant or optometrist.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other orthoptic students who aspire to a leadership role?

I would strongly recommend any aspiring leaders in orthoptics to take as many opportunities as possible to **put yourself out of their comfort zone, to meet new people and build your network in the process**. I would also recommend making the most of clinical placements by learning from others with experience. Ask lots of questions and be sure to take the information and any feedback on board.

# Osteopathy

**Joshua Maney**  
Swansea University

## What does it mean to be an osteopath?

Osteopathy is a way of detecting, treating and preventing health problems by moving, stretching and massaging a person's muscles and joints. The principles of osteopathy are that an individual's function and health is dependent on systems such as the musculoskeletal, viscera and the neuro-network functioning together. To be an osteopath is a huge honour; to help better patients' lives and improve their function is a very rewarding feeling.

## As a student osteopath, what leadership roles did you undertake?

As a student osteopath, enhancing leadership skills is vitally important. It is imperative that we can take control in our profession and practice confidently. Leadership is a key aspect to making this possible. Because of my experience on the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme, I met exciting new people who were passionate about their future career prospects, just like myself. From paramedics to physiotherapists, they all challenged me to adapt and evolve ideas about healthcare and each represented a new task that I had not considered before. The Programme helped me to enhance my networking skills and my communication skills.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional osteopath?

The value of leadership for osteopaths and students is that leadership is everywhere, not just as a practitioner in a clinic but also as an individual. We need to be on time, organised and trustworthy. Leadership is taking control, evaluating situations and being able to make decisions. These skills are key for relationship building and taking care of clients and patients.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other osteopathy students who aspire to a leadership role?

I would encourage other students to seize opportunities that come your way to learn and develop yourself. I think it's important to ensure you know what your goals are and remain focussed on those goals. You should also set achievable smaller targets and celebrate your little wins each day. From an osteopath's point of view, you use more muscles to frown than you do to smile. Smile more – it's easier for you!





# Paramedic science

## John Gladwell

Oxford Brookes University

### What does it mean to be a paramedic?

Being a paramedic is an opportunity to be a patient's first advocate. You are responsible for bringing calm and reassurance to an often chaotic situation. It's a varied and exciting role, which is different every day.

### As a student paramedic, what leadership roles did you undertake?

I've been in a leadership role when working as the lead clinician when attending cases on the road as part of a three-person crew. This includes leading crews in various, difficult circumstances which you sometimes are not prepared for, including road traffic collisions, stabbings and cardiac arrests. In addition, I have helped to develop and train junior crew mates, including non-clinicians and first and second year students.

With a colleague from the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme, I've been working to organise my own conference to support other students and professionals to develop their leadership skills.

### What is the value of leadership as a student and professional paramedic?

The modern paramedic has one of the highest levels of autonomy as a newly qualified practitioner, and can be the senior on scene for some, if not all, of a case. Therefore, investing in the development of one's leadership skills is essential. A paramedic is expected to work with a range of clinical grades from non-clinicians to volunteer responders as well as other paramedics and individuals from other agencies including the police and fire service. The role involves taking the lead in dynamic and evolving situations that can be unpredictable.



## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other paramedic science students who aspire to a leadership role?

Take the opportunity to develop your leadership skills in the safe environment of being with your mentor, as well as leading cases with the 'safety net' of having the clinician being there as additional support. Start small by leading the initial questioning, then making decisions on treatment, and assigning roles. **It's important to learn how to delegate – there is no expectation for you to do everything!**

# Physiotherapy

**Nick Flanagan**  
Teesside University

## What does it mean to be a physiotherapist?

Physiotherapy is a multifaceted and hugely varied profession. We often meet people at their most vulnerable and have the privilege of being part of that person's journey. We are critical thinkers and problem solvers, perfectly placed to support people through injury, illness or disability.

## As a student physiotherapist, what leadership roles did you undertake?

I had an interest in learning about rehabilitation for people living with HIV. This wasn't something that was covered on my university course as it is a more specialist topic. I used my initiative and research skills to explore the area and its relevance to physiotherapy. When I took part in the Student Leadership Programme, I learned about the power of professional networking on social media. Within days, I had developed an extensive and supportive network of likeminded professionals.

I found out about an international conference happening in Canada for which I sourced funding and attended. Following the trip, I went on to partake in research which culminated in publishing evidence at an international conference. This was an invaluable experience that has merged my skills between clinical practice and research.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional physiotherapist?

Your university experience can equip you with a unique professional skill set and make you a safe practitioner. Investing in the development of your leadership skills enables you to become more self-aware and confident to put yourself forward for new opportunities. These qualities make us better humans, and ultimately help us to progress both personally and professionally.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other physiotherapy students who aspire to a leadership role?

There is a leader inside every single one of us. Believe in yourself: be brave and be bold!



# Podiatry

**Catherine Keane**

University of Brighton

## What does it mean to be a podiatrist?

Podiatrists are healthcare professionals who have been trained to diagnose and treat abnormal conditions of the feet and lower limbs. Podiatrists help keep people free to be active, pain-free, ulcer-free and amputation-free. Podiatry can be life-changing, life-enhancing and life-prolonging for our patients.

## As a student podiatrist, what leadership roles did you undertake?

I've done lots as a student podiatrist. Some of the highlights include being selected to take part in the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme and being the podiatry student representative on an AHP student reference group for Health Education England. I am also the only student representative that is part of their Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention (RePAIR) national advisory group.

At university, I am an academic student representative. This role involves feeding any problems or ideas linked to academic content from students back to university tutors and/or administrative staff. We meet with department staff, service providers and others to act as advocates for other students from the cohort. I agreed to be one of the representatives to challenge myself in an interesting role.

Through the Student Leadership Programme, I became a student representative on a working group for the College of Podiatry (CoP). The group looks at designing a preceptorship programme that fosters a culture of support that both preceptors and preceptees can access at any stage of their career.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional podiatrist?

In all walks of life, we require leaders to push the envelope of what is deemed the accepted norm. However, this is more relevant when you consider those that work within the healthcare field. As students we are taught best practice; in reality, there is no one size fits all solution and we have to think outside the box. Understanding this is paramount as all healthcare professionals are ultimately the patients' advocates and all care should be patient centred.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other podiatry students who aspire to a leadership role?

If you find an interesting opportunity, jump with both feet! **Get out of your comfort zone and you will be amazed at what you can achieve.** You learn more about yourself with these opportunities and can meet inspirational people along the way.

# Diagnostic radiography

**Steven Cox**  
University of Exeter

## What does it mean to be a diagnostic radiographer?

Diagnostic radiographers are an essential component of the NHS, providing imaging for patients at all stages of their pathways. We interact with most patients who come into the hospital in a vast array of modalities, such as X-ray, CT and MRI, as well as in advanced practice and consultant roles.

## As a student diagnostic radiographer, what leadership roles did you undertake?

As a student radiographer my first steps into a leadership role was by leading a peer assisted learning scheme. The scheme involved more experienced students supporting first years as they began their time at university. By creating resources, a website and working with 10 student mentors, we provided a comprehensive service aiding new students both pastorally and with a tricky curriculum.

A supportive lecturer encouraged me to apply for the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme. It gave me great insight into the world of leadership and inspired me to further pursue areas through which I could expand my skillset. This inspiration, along with a supportive lecturer, led me to be awarded funding from the Society and College of Radiographers to conduct research.



## What is the value of leadership as a student and professional diagnostic radiographer?

As an independent practitioner, being a radiographer does take leadership as you try to manage complex patients often through difficult and uncomfortable procedures. It takes key leadership skills such as resilience and communication to achieve the best possible images for your patients. By developing these skills as a student, it will stand you in good stead at all levels of the profession.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other diagnostic radiography students who aspire to a leadership role?

My advice to radiography students who want to be leaders is that it is never too early to seek out as many opportunities and experiences as you can. There are so many incredibly valuable experiences for radiography students. **Don't forget about the power of starting small. Think about how to make small changes which can make a difference. As a result, you will be surprised how putting yourself out there will quickly open many doors.**

# Therapeutic radiography

## Nichola Jamison

Ulster University

### What does it mean to be therapeutic radiographer?

Therapeutic radiographers use high dose ionising radiation to treat cancer and its symptoms. Being at the frontline in cancer services gives me the opportunity to walk side by side with our patients through their cancer journey and to hopefully help them feel safe and positive through this difficult time.

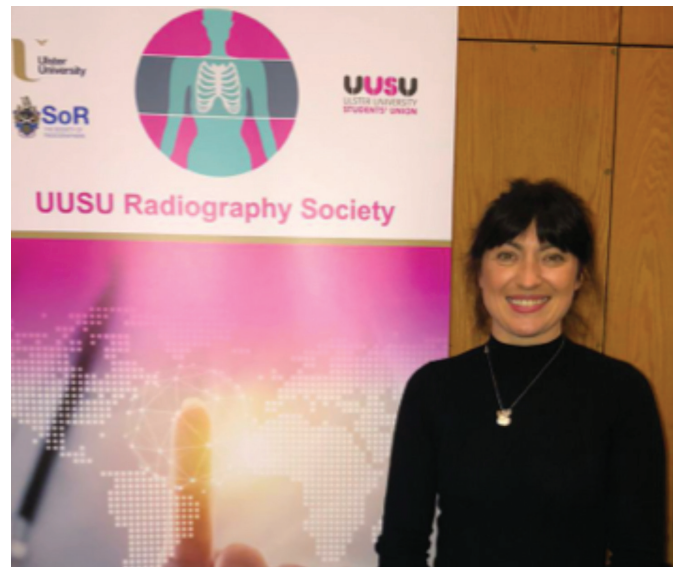
### As a student therapeutic radiographer, what leadership roles did you undertake?

I am the academic representative for my cohort and the School of Health Sciences, as well as the founder and president of the Ulster University Radiography Society. I have been a student representative for the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) and was elected Chair of the SCoR Student Representative Forum. We represent students from across the UK to action new campaigns and policies centred around improving the student experience within radiography in the UK.

My long-term passion is to improve the provision of psycho-oncology services. I recently wrote to the permanent Health Secretary of NI, outlining the need for students and new graduates to be involved in the drafting of the NI Cancer Strategy 2020. I now sit on both the Cancer Prevention and Care and Support sub-groups of this strategy and have had the privilege of contributing to the recommendations put forward in these chapters. I am also a member of the Northern Ireland Healthcare Leadership Forum which connects health students and professionals through organising topic-centred study events which focus on issues relevant to healthcare in Northern Ireland.

### What is the value of leadership as a student and professional therapeutic radiographer?

Taking part in the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme taught me that as undergraduates and professionals, we should always be asking ourselves 'Where am I, and what more can I do?'. This is a question I carry with me every day. I feel that if we each embrace leadership within our roles, we can only improve on what we do every day.



Constant reflection and evaluation of our practices enables us to give the best to our patients and maintain passion for our chosen career while representing our profession to the highest standard we can. Furthermore, sharing these leadership values and experiences with our colleagues is an important step in encouraging others to gain the confidence to become their own leaders.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other therapeutic radiography students who aspire to a leadership role?

Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. We all have our own perceptions of what leadership is, but in truth it is simply having the confidence to voice and implement your ideas and suggestions for improvement, no matter the situation. Take a moment and think about times when you've felt that you would have done something differently or reflected on how a situation affected you or others. **You're already a leader. And the moment you start believing it, others will too.**

# Speech and language therapy

## Anne Onwusiri

City, University of London

### What does it mean to be a speech and language therapist?

Being a speech and language therapist (SLT) is about helping people of all ages and backgrounds to improve their communication and treating those with eating and drinking difficulties.

### As a student speech and language therapist, what leadership roles have you undertaken?

I have taken on a number of leadership roles as a student speech and language therapist. My first leadership role was when I was elected by my cohort as the programme representative. Since then, I have also acted as the post-graduate taught rep for City Student's Union, Chair of the City Student Union Executive Committee and an elected member of City, University of London Senate. I found this opportunity by nominating myself during our Student Union's election period. Through the power of social media, I found out about the Council of Deans of Health's Student Leadership Programme; I applied and successfully gained a place on their 2019 programme.

I have also been a member of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' (RCSLT) working group for diversity, which involved working with students and qualified SLTs to explore issues related to ethnicity and diversity within Speech and Language Therapy across the UK.

I have thoroughly enjoyed taking on these roles and have found I have been able to advocate for other and learnt a lot more about being a strong and effective leader. At times, I have struggled with imposter syndrome but I have realised that no one else is doubting your position – why are you?



### What is the value of leadership as a student and professional speech and language therapist?

Communication and confidence are key to be a leader and being a speech and language therapist. I have also recognised an increased importance in being able to advocate for others, both in a leadership capacity amongst fellow students as well as with clients and colleagues.

## ADVICE

### What is your advice to other speech and language therapy students who aspire to a leadership role?

Just do it! Find what you are passionate about and stick with it. Don't be afraid to stand out from the crowd and ask the difficult questions.





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