



Student Case Study – Lucy Machen, Children's Hospice

“Placements are an excellent opportunity to learn from others who have had practical experience and to build upon your skills and knowledge in a supportive environment.”

Lucy Machen - BN Bachelor of Nursing (Child Health)

Can you tell us about the placement opportunity you were involved in and what your role entailed?

I had the opportunity during my second year to spend one of my placements in a children's hospice. I was somewhat nervous before the placement started, as this was very different to anywhere I had worked before. I had preconceptions of what a hospice would be like, and what the role of a nurse there might involve. The five weeks I spent on placement there proved that I was entirely wrong. The role of Staff Nurses within the hospice included one-to-one care of babies or children with life-limiting or palliative conditions. Daily care might include a range of medications, feeding, ventilation support and airway maintenance. However, the role is so much more than that. My time on this placement showed me what exemplary child/family-centred care can look like. The nurses made memories with children and families, doing sensory activities, arts and crafts, playing games and taking trips out. We supported entire families and ensured they created happy memories with their loved ones. We had difficult conversations about end-of-life care, in a way that left young people and families feeling calm and in control. The clinical skills I was able to learn and practise on this placement made me feel for the first time like I was actually "being a nurse," but it was the wider range of personal and emotional skills I developed which have added to my nursing knowledge, and to shaping the nurse I will be when I qualify.

What key skills did your placement teach you?

This placement taught me a range of key clinical skills, including airway management, PEG feeding, medication management for children with more complex health needs and bladder/bowel support. I learned about a range of moving and handling aids and developed an understanding of the needs of children with complex health requirements. I was also able to further develop my interpersonal skills and gain a much deeper understanding of family-centred care. The team I worked with were keen to support my learning and wanted to share their knowledge, not just of clinical skills but also of the journey for children, young people and families who are dealing with a life-limiting condition. I learned how to have discussions about end-of-life care, and about what nursing staff can do to make the experience a better one. This is something incredibly valuable, and that I think I will always carry with me.

What were your highlights and key successes of your time on placement?

Due to this being a second-year placement, I was able to provide a lot more hands-on care, this was a huge step in my degree. The biggest highlight was the change in my understanding of what hospice is. Despite the nature of the support offered, it is a place filled with happiness, where the focus is on supporting entire families, making memories, and easing both physical and emotional suffering. I worked at the hospice in the weeks preceding Christmas and was able to see a range of activities carried out for the enjoyment of the children and young people. This included a day trip to visit Father Christmas. Seeing the joy of the children and families on meeting the man himself was wonderful, and I am so pleased that I was able to be a small part of that special day.



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“Nursing placements are the time when you really combine your university learning. Everything that was taught in theory modules and clinical skills comes together, and you can put what you have learned into practice.”

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Did you face any challenges during your time on placement?

I had some really difficult conversations with parents and carers throughout this placement. The additional strain on families during such a challenging time is huge. After one particularly honest and tough conversation, I shed tears on my way home. I think what I learnt was that we are all human, and as nurses, we are meant to be compassionate people. It is normal for these events to impact us too, but in the moment, we need to be able to provide the right support. I had some excellent conversations with different staff about how to have these conversations and also how to protect myself emotionally. The key for me was allowing myself time to reflect and making time for self-care. This placement taught me a lot about the value of self-care, in order to be able to care for others.

How do you feel that your studies at Edinburgh Napier University prepare you for this placement?

We have completed a range of different theory modules, as well as having time in the Simulation and Clinical Skills Centre. Both were completely invaluable to this placement. I needed the clinical skills to be able to provide the care expected towards my patients.

I had gained confidence from practising procedures and was able to put what I had learned into practice. What was equally valuable was the content from various theory modules. For example the importance of self-care to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue. We discussed the importance of reflection in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our practice. I carried this knowledge with me into placement.

Do you think your experience(s) from the placement affected your future career plans or last year of university?

I would love the opportunity to return to the same area having further developed my nursing skills, and to continue to learn from the staff, children, and families in the hospice. Since completing this placement, I have continued to seek personal learning opportunities around life-limiting conditions and end-of-life care. It has become an area I am very interested in, and I could see myself seeking opportunities to work in this type of nursing role when I am qualified. Given my worries before the placement began, this is a complete change in my attitude towards this area of work. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn more, and to understand what the experiences of a nurse in a hospice can be.

What advice would you give to someone considering doing a placement at university?

Starting a placement can be nerve-wracking, but it can teach you so much. Ask if there are additional learning opportunities, to watch a procedure you are unfamiliar with, ask questions about a condition you haven't heard of before, or why a medication has been chosen. Learn what you need to do to protect your wellbeing and remind yourself that you are still a student. You are not expected to know everything. Have an open mind and desire to learn, placements are a truly incredible experience and one that anyone would benefit from.