



## Student Placement Case Study – Sharmaine Watters, NHS Fife

“Placement taught me valuable information about myself as a midwifery professional and as an individual.”

**Sharmaine Watters - Masters in Midwifery**

### Please tell us a bit about yourself

I am currently a second-year student studying a Master's in Midwifery. I am non-judgemental, person-focused with compassionate care being a topic that I hold near and dear to my heart. Previous to my time at Napier, I completed an undergraduate degree in Applied Healthcare and spent three years working in an acute hospital setting as a healthcare assistant. Knowing that I had a pivotal role within the multidisciplinary team and was provided with the opportunity to assist patients to identify and fulfil their health goals and expectations filled me with joy. I believe that all health journeys should be directed by the individual who is receiving care. I always wanted to be in a position where I helped people - that is my goal in life, to help make the world a better place through providing care to the people who need it.

### What was the opportunity you were involved with?

For the purpose of patient privacy and confidentiality, I cannot give specific details about the area in which I was working at the time of the placement, however, the placement opportunity relates to a first-year labour ward within NHS Fife.

### What did your role entail?

The role of a student midwife can be confusing at times, you ask yourself a lot of questions: What can I do? What shouldn't I be doing?

Did I do that right? What could I have done better? Typically, the student midwife role involves being a temporary member of the multidisciplinary team where you observe and assist in the care of birthing people and their families, this covers several tasks. Whilst I was on this labour ward placement, I had the fortunate opportunity to assist in and observe several tasks which are all included: listening in to a baby's heartbeat, discussing birth plans with families, providing education and support regarding birthing choices, providing non-judgemental person-centred care to all individuals, supporting birthing people in labour (e.g. facilitating a relaxing and calm environment, following birth plans where possible, appropriate pain relief and providing encouragement/support to birthing people), providing post-natal education to birthing people and their families, acting in cases of an emergency and debrief counselling when adverse events occur.

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

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that 'typical' learning opportunities have been changed slightly. With this in mind, I believe that ENU did the very best that it could with the guidelines and limited resources that were available at the time. Lectures were given virtually via MS Teams and each lecture was recorded which has been beneficial as it allows students to watch over lectures if they are uncertain about something that was discussed during class or if a student couldn't make a class for various reasons. The academic staff also tried their best to allow us to attend the university for some face-to-face simulation skills which I found beneficial. They were also always there to support you and to provide the encouragement that students needed.

“Placement has allowed me to apply theory to practice and has allowed me to better understand the adaptations that occur within the body as labour progresses.”



“Placement taught me a lot of skills that I have continued to build on during my time as a student midwife at Edinburgh Napier University. ”

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

The highlight of this placement was each time after a baby had been born once everything in the room was okay and both parents and baby were settled. Taking a step back and seeing that golden picture of a family celebrating the success of what has just been achieved, that's something really special. I also got to see that sometimes pregnancy and birth isn't a time of positivity, rejoice and celebration - being present with birthing people and providing them with the support that they needed at that moment was also something that I would consider a highlight of my time in labour ward.

### Did you face any challenges during your time on placement?

I faced many challenges during this placement, as previously mentioned, as a student you ask a lot of questions. The main question that I repeatedly asked myself during this placement was “*how can I keep doing this?*”? Between the exhaustion, the long work hours, traveling, what seemed like the never-ending pile of university work, supplementary reading, and extra training courses I was exhausted. To combat this exhaustion, I ensured that I ate well, (tried) to stay well-rested - though it's easier said than done, remembered to regularly check in with myself to make sure I was doing okay, and if not, I reached out for support from family, friends, work colleagues and members of the teaching staff at Napier. It was at this time I started a reflective diary which has helped me immensely since, not only does it allow me to keep an anonymous account of the patients and families I have had the pleasure of caring for, but it also allows me to continually evaluate and reflect on myself and my practice. I have found this to be a highly beneficial tool.

### What key skills did your placement teach you?

Placement has allowed me to develop and further improve on my existing clinical and interpersonal skills, in addition to teaching me an abundance of new and valuable clinical skills such as: Reading and interpreting a cardio-toco-graph machines, positions that can be adopted during birth, holistic assessments, monitoring patients, evaluation and amendment of birth and care plans in partnership with birthing people and their families, facilitation of the activities of daily living (e.g., nutrition, hydration, continence & skin integrity), support birthing people to maintain comfort throughout their birthing journey, provision of adequate pain relief, The importance of timely referral of other healthcare professionals, protocols that must be adhered to, basic post-natal care, that all births regardless of the outcome are valid and important, provision of education and immediate care of new-born babies. The concept surrounding pregnancy and birth has always amazed me and always sparked my spirit of inquiry. The team that I worked with on this placement were very compassionate, supportive, and willing to facilitate my learning. They taught me that you don't always have to know everything and that within the midwifery profession you are never alone, your colleagues are always there to provide you with the support. On an individual level, I realised that I do have the capabilities and integrity to adapt to a busy department. I have also learned how to emotionally process and deal with the more stressful events that can occur at any moment during the pregnancy and the birthing journey.

### Would you recommend doing a placement to others?

I would highly recommend doing a placement to other students, it allows you an opportunity to learn about your profession through a practical lens. It also helps facilitate skill development and build confidence.

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

To anyone who is considering doing a placement as part of their university course, I would say absolutely go for it! I know it can seem like a daunting experience, but I do believe that it is really worth it. Working as a student allows you to view things from a different perspective and (at least in my experience) has allowed me to observe the ways in which people practice the profession this allows me to shape my own future practice. I guess what I'm trying to say is it gives you an opportunity to be exposed to the various ways people do things and because you're a student you can try different ways of doing things and decide how you want to practice once it's within your employment standards of proficiency.