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STEPPING OUT OF THE LABORATORY

THE TRANSFUSION PRACTITIONER ROLE

We hear about the multidisciplinary role of the transfusion practitioner and the benefits to the patient, service and individual.

In 1998, the Department of Health launched the Better Blood Transfusion initiative to improve transfusion safety. The initiative recommended establishing hospital transfusion committees (HTCs), participating in the Serious Hazards of Transfusion (SHOT) haemovigilance scheme and implementing transfusion protocols. This led to the introduction of transfusion practitioners (TPs) in some hospitals.

In 2002, the Better Blood Transfusion: Appropriate Use of Blood Health Service Circular recommended the introduction of TPs and hospital transfusion teams across the UK. By 2010, over 200 TPs were employed in England and Wales, with Scotland trialling the role in 2001 and deploying 18 by 2003, supported by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service. In 1999, The Republic of Ireland (RoI) established the haemovigilance officer (HVO) role.

Today, over 500 TPs and HVOs are employed across the UK and RoI, with slight variations in their roles depending on the country. At their core, these positions aim to improve patient safety throughout the transfusion process. Anecdotal feedback from teams indicates that while these roles were initially filled predominantly by nurses, there is now a growing representation of biomedical scientists.

The following conversation with a biomedical scientist TP offers a first-hand perspective on the

opportunities and challenges of transitioning into this rewarding role. In this context, the term TP will refer to both TP and HVO roles.

What has your career path been so far?

My fascination with biology and disease inspired me to pursue a degree in biomedical science. After university, I was employed as a medical laboratory assistant in the haematology department and was fortunate to quickly advance to the role of biomedical scientist. Transfusion became my favourite discipline within haematology. I completed my IBMS Specialist Portfolio in Haematology and Transfusion Science and discovered a passion for teaching and mentoring colleagues. When the opportunity arose to apply for a TP role, I seized it. A timely TP position enabled me to merge my skills, transfusion expertise and passion into a role where I could drive meaningful change.

Why did you become a TP?

It all started with a visit to another trust. I was there to see a colleague and they introduced me to someone from their TP team. What struck me immediately was how much they genuinely seemed to enjoy their job; they were at their desk, smiling and you could just tell they loved what they did.

I later discovered this TP had a biomedical science background like me, which was a game-changer.



● **More than 500 transfusion practitioners and hospital transfusion haemovigilance officers are employed across the UK and RoI.**

● **At their core, these positions aim to improve patient safety throughout the transfusion process.**

● **The role draws on a lot of biomedical scientist skills and is good for those who enjoy meeting and collaborating with new people, overcoming challenges, working in a team and thinking creatively.**



Knowing someone similar had transitioned successfully made the role feel attainable.

That's not to say I didn't like working in the laboratory – I did. There's a special kind of satisfaction when you're working on a patient's sample, matching it to the correct blood unit, and knowing you've made a direct difference. But part of me wanted to have a broader impact: helping lots of patients and shaping transfusion processes.

What do you like about being a TP?

Being a TP has allowed me to develop the skills that I've always enjoyed – teaching, collaboration, incident investigations and audits. Recognising how all these elements come together to make a positive difference is very rewarding.

Transitioning into the TP role has built on these strengths and passions, while also contributing to improving patient care in a meaningful way.

I enjoyed mentoring my biomedical scientist colleagues in the lab, and now my role involves broader education across the trust. I also teach undergraduate nurses and medics and facilitate non-medical authorisation (NMA) events, collaborating with nursing TP colleagues to design and deliver key training. It's a great example of how multidisciplinary teamwork enhances transfusion practices and patient care.

One of my favourite aspects of being a TP is explaining to clinical staff what happens to a sample once it reaches the lab. It's deeply satisfying to know this understanding benefits patients, improves workflows, and strengthens lab-clinical relationships.

As a TP with a biomedical science background, I take pride in highlighting the critical, often unsung contributions of biomedical scientists.

While I deeply respect the vital work done in the lab, the TP position offers a platform to share ideas and drive change. Not every idea is adopted, but being heard is empowering and makes the work incredibly meaningful.

Do you feel as if you have a positive impact on patient safety as a TP?

When I first moved from the frontline laboratory to a desk-based TP role it was a tough adjustment. I remember questioning my decision, wondering if I was making any impact at all. I went

from working hands-on in the lab to what felt like being removed from the action.

Over time, I came to appreciate the significant impact I could have as a TP. Now, I focus on educating healthcare professionals involved in transfusion, whether through face-to-face teaching or by ensuring access to approved education platforms. From guiding staff through the complexities of transfusion to promoting best practices, I've realised how this knowledge can create a ripple effect, enhancing safety and care for countless patients.

A significant aspect of my role involves managing incidents. Not only responding to them but also analysing them clinically, identifying trends and applying human factors principles to design effective safeguards. Collaborating with clinical teams to implement these measures has a direct impact on patient safety, and witnessing the positive results of these changes is incredibly fulfilling.

Compliance is central to the role, ensuring adherence to Blood Safety and Quality Regulations (BSQR) across the trust. This foundation supports safe, effective transfusion practices and is vital for patient outcomes.

One area I've found particularly meaningful is Patient Blood Management (PBM). Sharing national and local recommendations and integrating them into practice goes beyond ticking boxes, it's about fostering a standardised approach to transfusion processes, making them safer and more efficient. The knowledge that these changes directly contribute to patient protection and good stewardship of the donor's gift is a powerful motivator.

Looking back, the transition from the lab to this role was challenging, but it's been more than worth it. I feel incredibly proud to contribute to patient safety and care in such a meaningful way.

How have your expectations of this career path differed from the reality?

When I became a TP, I expected more patient contact, time in clinical areas, teaching, and the authority to drive change quickly. However, the reality was different and, at times, challenging. I did not appreciate how much of my time would be dedicated to investigating incidents and conducting audits. Closing incidents can be time-consuming, especially considering the time needed to meet with clinical staff across shift patterns.

Throughout this process, I've learned to support staff during investigations with an awareness of their workload and an understanding of the importance of developing emotional intelligence. Transitioning from a lab-focused biomedical scientist role to a TP has been eye-opening, particularly in understanding the pressures faced on hospital wards.

“Becoming a TP requires strong time management, supporting others and building meaningful relationships”



DETAILS OF THE ROLE

Details relating to the role of the transfusion practitioner (e.g. service model and employer) can differ across the UK and Rol. For the purpose of this article some aspects of the role may differ from the examples given or may not be detailed. Contact your local TP/HVO and refer to "Explore Further" for more information. To download a document on the differences and similarities of role across the UK and Rol, visit

● b.link/466n8rmm



EXPLORE FURTHER

 Information about Transfusion Practitioners:

● b.link/a2nq1tc8

 The National Blood

Transfusion Committee's Transfusion Training Hub:
● b.link/m19mlvz8

 Transfusion Practitioners Across the World podcast:
● b.link/evzehutu

I found that many people didn't fully understand the role of a TP or its value. Early on, I had to champion my role to help others recognise the contributions and solutions I could offer. Although initially frustrating, I quickly realised the importance of networking and building professional connections, both within the hospital and externally. Over time, these networks became invaluable. These experiences have made me appreciate the essential role of human factors, emotional intelligence, and compassion.

One of the aspects I love most about being a TP is the opportunity for development. Like many of my TP colleagues across the country, I've had the chance to pursue further qualifications, such as a PgCert in clinical education, an MSc in transfusion, and leadership training.

Acquiring skills in project management, organisation and facilitation has allowed me to grow beyond my initial expectations. This has given me a deeper appreciation of my sphere of influence and the ability to make an impact at a local and, occasionally, at a national level.

Tps can engage in national-level projects. It's rewarding to know that our work impacts not just our trust but the wider transfusion community.

I enjoy collaborating with TPs from diverse backgrounds, learning from their unique perspectives. Transfusion is complex and finding the right solution often requires multiple viewpoints. While many TPs work independently, UK national networks foster collaboration and support.

What skills do you feel are essential to be a TP?

Stepping out of the lab was a huge leap beyond my comfort zone, but it's been one of the most rewarding decisions of my career. This role is ideal for those who enjoy meeting and collaborating with new people, overcoming challenges, working in a team and thinking creatively.

While a solid understanding of transfusion knowledge is essential, becoming a TP also requires a passion for learning, strong time management, supporting others and building meaningful relationships. Developing the ability to review and interpret clinical notes is vital for investigating transfusion reactions.

The role is about inspiring and empowering others through teaching, mentoring, and collaboration. Strong communication skills are essential for facilitating education events and answering challenging questions. Determination and influencing skills help ensure high standards of clinical care. Experience in coaching and mentoring, as well as proactively training new staff or

supporting students, builds leadership skills and demonstrates potential.

What are your career aspirations?

Looking ahead, I intend to get involved with a national haemovigilance project and further develop my skills for PBM.

The TP role has helped me expand my transfusion knowledge while also developing transferable skills and a deeper understanding of healthcare at an organisational level. I believe this will be valuable when applying for other roles, including promotions.

I'm thoroughly enjoying my role as a TP and actively seek opportunities to engage with groups at the trust, local and national levels. This role enhances my transfusion expertise and helps me develop organisational and NHS strategic skills. Continuing to learn is essential, and CPD opportunities are widely available. I would encourage anyone to participate in CPD events and explore national CPD platforms.

What advice would you give to a biomedical scientist considering a TP role?

Talking to your local TP is a great way to understand the role. Gaining experience in lab training and familiarising yourself with the quality management system can also provide a strong advantage.

Seek out every opportunity, no matter how small, as they build a solid foundation for stepping into roles. As a biomedical scientist, I actively got involved beyond the lab bench. I led lab tours for clinical staff, offering insights into behind-the-scenes work and provided education for biomedical scientist colleagues, helping them grow skills and confidence. These fulfilling experiences laid the groundwork for my transition to TP and continue to enrich my work.

If you're passionate about transfusion science, patient care and supporting others, take the leap – you might surprise yourself with what you can achieve. 📧

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