

# A short-stay fellowship in Amsterdam

Visit at a Dutch hospital proves to be a welcome experience for British specialist nurse



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**I have been a uro-oncology nurse practitioner at the Homerton University Hospital, London since December 2004, and work with another specialist nurse who leads the benign urology nursing service. Our team includes three consultant surgeons, one consultant clinical oncologist, three trainee urologists and two junior doctors.**

I run nurse services in haematuria, PSA monitoring, rapid access TRUS and biopsy, prostate cancer follow-up, prostate cancer telephone follow-up, intravesical therapies, bone metastases, bisphosphonate treatments and I am learning flexible cystoscopy's. I have also been working at Whipps Cross University Hospital one day a week since June 2008 where I am developing a nurse practitioner-led prostate cancer follow-up clinic and rapid access prostate biopsy clinic. The benign nurse-led service involves a catheter complications clinic, prostate assessment clinic, erectile dysfunction clinic, intravesical therapy clinic for bladder pain and urodynamics.

The Homerton University Hospital provide diagnostic services, day unit procedures and non-radical pelvic procedures. The Whipps Cross Hospital is the designated pelvic cancer centre for North East London where our patients attend for major pelvic surgery such as cystectomy and radical prostatectomy. Whipps Cross Hospital has a team of four consultant surgeons and three specialist nurses.

## EAUN fellowship

I have applied for the EAUN fellowship for several reasons. For my own professional development I would welcome the opportunity to see how patients are cared for and managed in another European country and to see if the treatments offered in the UK are the same. I would also like the opportunity to see how nurse practitioners in another country work and if I can borrow from their experience.

In this modern era healthcare is extending across borders and with the freedom of movement of EU

citizens it would benefit me greatly to experience another European health care system so that I can understand why many patients feel the health care system is very different in the UK. This experience would help me cater for patients from other countries to ease their anxieties with the UK system. I would also like to set up lasting links with another hospital so that together we can build a partnership of learning to help other nurse practitioners share experiences.

## Host institution

The world renowned Netherlands Cancer Institute incorporates the Netherlands Cancer Institute and the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Ziekenhuis (hospital). The hospital is a tertiary referral centre for the Netherlands specialising only in cancer treatment. The urology ward is incorporated into the surgical unit and has 15 beds. There are also outpatient clinics, a medical oncology unit, chemotherapy suite, day surgery unit, a radiotherapy centre with 10 accelerators, a research centre, psycho-social research unit and a state of the art operating theatres (equipped with state of the art equipment such as the DaVinci robot) and a critical care unit.

The urology department has one urology professor and three senior urologists, two nurse practitioners, four entero-stomal therapists that also specialise in continence, sexuality and wound care and 55 oncology trained nurses on the ward. The unit is a welcoming, calm environment that is clearly committed to providing high quality nursing and medical care to a range of patients with urological (and other) disease. The hospital is modern, bright and airy and has a very cheerful, friendly demeanour. All levels of staff went completely out of their way to make me feel welcome in the hospital and even carried out their duties (as much as possible) in English so that I could understand what was happening.



Sightseeing in Amsterdam



The Netherlands Cancer Institute- Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital (NKI-AVL).

The surgical urology department provides services such as robot assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy, brachytherapy, perineal prostatectomy, cystectomy and all types of reconstructive and diversion surgery, bladder brachytherapy, nephrectomy, radio-frequency ablation of renal tumours or metastases, TURBT, lymph node dissections and penectomies.

The nurse practitioner team provide specialist advice to the ward nurses, junior doctors and other members of the multi-disciplinary team as well as to patients and their families. There is a well developed nurse practitioner-led pre-admission clinic, prostate cancer follow-up clinic, flexible cystoscopy service, telephone advice line, research input. The nurse practitioners also take part in education of nurses and other health care professionals inside and outside the NKI-AVL. They take part in development of national guidelines and take initiative in innovative care strategies.

## A familiar city

I chose the Netherlands as I was familiar with Amsterdam. I chose a hotel which was closer to the hospital than the city centre, and that was a big mistake. It took nearly two hours to be able to get a shuttle-bus from the airport to the hotel. When I arrived at the hotel they were not expecting me until the day after, there was no bar or restaurant. I had asked for a double room as my partner was with me for the weekend but unfortunately they couldn't give me a double room. The room they did give me didn't even have any heating that worked! We couldn't even take off our coats in the hotel and needless to say checked out within 30 minutes of arriving.

On Monday morning, my mentor Willem de Blok met me at the hotel that I had checked out of. I was immediately struck by how aesthetically pleasing the hospital was. I was taken to get my uniform and staff pass and was shown around the hospital. I was particularly struck by how friendly the staff were to me and to each other in the hospital.

At 11 a.m. everyone went for coffee together including nurses, doctors and support staff and the same thing happened at lunch time. People seemed to genuinely get on well together which is a big contrast to the London hospitals in which I have worked.

I had a great week visiting different departments and getting the opportunity to ask questions and see things that I wanted to see – it was like being a student and I loved it!

On Friday afternoon, at the end of the shift, the nurses who were going off-duty opened wine and had a drink together. There was a real sense of collegiality and respect between the staff.

## Some tips

Following my visit (from November 3 to 7, 2008), my expectations were met and having met several British and Irish nurses and patients in Amsterdam, I have been inspired to consider working in another EU country. I feel that the links between our two hospitals can now develop further and we are hopefully going to undertake nursing research together to help inform and improve our practice.

I would very much encourage anyone interested to take the opportunity to undertake a fellowship programme but I would have some top tips. Get the host to arrange the hotel accommodation and transportation from the airport as this could save you a lot of unpleasant surprises. Research the price of drinks and meals before going to include in your proposed costs. Take a present from your home country for your host because they will really look after you, and most importantly, take a visiting fellowship opportunity as early as possible in your career – you may not want to go back home!

Finally, listing here all the names of the people who gave their support and assistance would not be enough. But, in particular, my sincere gratitude to the EAUN and Elsbeth Van Der Laan, Department Head Nurse at the Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam. To Elsbeth and her staff, in particular Willem De Blok, my mentor, my thanks for all your warm welcome and support!



The Netherlands Cancer Institute- Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital (NKI-AVL).