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## **Careers\_(Baker)**

### **What is your job?**

I am professor of mental health nursing at University of Leeds. My role is to undertake and support high quality mental health research, promote learning in students from undergraduate to post-doctorial levels, and work with the NHS and other organisation to enable change. I have also been recently appointed non-executive director at Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

### **Why did you become a nurse?**

My original intentions were to become a nurse and work for charities abroad with sick children. But early on in my student experience, a sister pulled me aside and commented that I was spending too much time talking to the patients and not engaging in the tasks of nursing. Luckily for me, I found mental health nursing.

### **Where did you train?**

I was in the first cohort to undertake the mental health branch of the Bachelor of Nursing degree at the University of Manchester. We had placements across the whole of Greater Manchester and we observed some fabulous examples of nursing. I was very fortunate to have some great lecturers and mentors, which made a lifelong lasting impression on me. My MSc in psychosocial interventions from the University of Sheffield probably changed the way I thought most about delivering clinical interventions in practice.

### **What do you most enjoy about your job?**

Creativity, challenge and the opportunity to make people - particularly nurses - think about what they do and how they can provide better quality care.

### **What is the greatest challenge?**

There are some huge clinical challenges in mental health and if I can improve the care for service users and carers even just a little bit, then I would have had a fantastic career. My day to day challenge is surviving in academia as it's highly competitive, at times ruthless and pretty unforgiving, and you encounter lots of rejection on the way.

### **What would you change if you could?**

The NHS is a great, fantastic resource that needs to be protected. It feels like there are continuous, very costly re-organisations, which are never rigorously evaluated. On a more practical level, I would like to make access to services easier and more logical, and reduce administrative burden to free up time to care. I would also ban staff saying 'in a minute'.

### **Outside work what do you enjoy doing?**

My time out of work is fun-filled and hectic. My kids are all very active and involved in lots of different sports. More recently, scuba diving has become my main hobby. It's one of the few things that enables my brain to completely switch off.

### **What inspires you?**

Most recently people and things on Twitter, as I find something inspiring in it every day. There have also been a number of inspirational people I have met during my career.

### **Of what achievement are you most proud?**

I am most proud of being a nurse and a dad. More recently my appointment as a professor in the school of healthcare at University of Leeds was a huge milestone in my career.

### **What makes a good nurse?**

Someone who cares about and values people, and is smart enough to make a difference.

### **What advice would you give to yourself when you were starting out as a nurse?**

Follow your path, and keep your values. If I changed things too much, I probably wouldn't have ended up where I am now. But I would encourage a younger me to travel and relax a little more.

### **What advice would you give to students and junior staff?**

Protect yourselves, particularly emotionally. I see lots of great students and staff who leave nursing, or become burned out fairly early in their careers. You have a long career ahead of you with fabulous opportunities, so take the chances as they arise.

*John Baker is professor of mental health nursing at University of Leeds*