



# Nicola Robinson

Lead Pharmacy  
Technician

## What does your job entail?

I work with a team of technicians and pharmacists in the Pharmacy Aseptic Unit. I am the Lead Technician with management responsibilities for all the technicians in the unit, I am responsible for ensuring the technicians are all appropriately trained for the safe preparation of IV chemotherapy, specialist biological medicines and TPN in Isolators and Laminar Air Flow cabinets in the clean rooms in the unit. This involves ensuring all the operator validations are completed and kept up to date. Everything is very tightly controlled and audited. The cabinets and cleanrooms are continually environmentally monitored, I ensure the schedule for environmental monitoring is followed, involves using Agar settle-plates which monitor bacterial/fungal contamination within the cabinets and cleanrooms, recording pressure checks, ensure all the appropriate cleaning/decontamination/servicing schedules are followed and all the appropriate records are kept up to date. Ensure all the standard operating procedures, drug worksheets/labels are valid and updated. I check that there is sufficient stock of drugs for the following week's oncology/haematology clinics in the Cancer Unit and for other pending treatments on the wards/specialist clinics within the hospital. Ensure appropriate stock control as most of these drugs are high cost and need to be ordered appropriately to reduce drug wastage/expired stock.

## How did you get into this line of work?

At school I was always interested in the sciences and had done Biology, Chemistry and Physics at A-level. I had applied to university to do Physiotherapy or Radiography. While waiting on my results I saw the Belfast City Hospital were advertising for Student Pharmacy Technicians. I wasn't sure if I would get the results I needed for university, so I looked into the Pharmacy Technician role, and decided to apply for the post. I was offered a position and decided to accept it and started in the September after having finished my A-levels in June of that same year.

## Outline your career to date

After having completed my A-levels in the June, I started the Belfast City Hospital as a Student Pharmacy Technician in September, this was a two year day release course at the Belfast Technical College at that time (this involved me going to the college one day and one evening a week and working in the Pharmacy Dept in the City Hospital the rest of the week). On completion of the course I was kept on by the hospital and worked as a qualified Pharmacy Technician, I worked for three years at MTO1 level and was then upgraded to MTO2 level. After working for 10 years at the City I was successful in getting a Senior MTO3 post in the Pharmacy Chemotherapy unit at Craigavon Area Hospital, this was a new Chemo unit at the time, and I was involved in setting it up with the appointed Pharmacists. This is where I am currently working. After approx. 19 years in that post, three years ago I was successful in applying for the post of the Lead Aseptic Technician for the new Aseptic Unit at Craigavon Area Hospital.

## Tell us about your qualifications and training

After my O-levels (equivalent to GCSE's), I stayed at school and completed my A-Levels. I then achieved a B-Tec National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Sciences whilst working at the Belfast City Hospital. The course is a mixture of theory, practical skills in pharmacology and pharmaceuticals, physiology, pharmacy practice, microbiology, laws and ethics, actions and uses of drugs and disease managements. I had on-going workplace training including training in the dispensary, in the Aseptic and Chemotherapy IV Preparation Units and at ward level. Four years ago, I had the opportunity to complete the PIP accreditation program (Pre and in-process checking), this allows me to carry out in-process checks of worksheets, ingredients, drug volumes during the preparation of IV chemotherapy and specialist medicines which would normally have been carried out by a pharmacist. I have also completed a management training course to help me in my management role as the Lead Aseptic Technician.

## What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

The job involves working with many different people so having the ability to work well with others and have good listening and communication skills are vital. In my management role it's important to remember that every person is different, and I need to be sensitive and show empathy towards staff depending on each of their situations. You need to have the ability to motivate people. You need to be flexible and approachable. You need to be very organised and have good time management.

## What is the best advice you've ever received?

Someone once told me treat everyone as you would like to be treated yourself, this has stayed with me over the years and now in my management role it is something I have always remembered. The way you treat and talk to some-one can have a huge impact on how they portray themselves and carry out their own work and duties. I have really good memories of my time working in the pharmacy in the Belfast City Hospital and this was due to the great team of staff I worked with there. Also, in my current role, I have the privilege of working now with a great team of technicians and pharmacists.

## What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have a 15-year-old daughter who has a lot of extracurricular activities, I spend quite a lot of time running her to dance classes or competitions and to piano lessons at the weekend and in the evenings. In my spare time I like to watch my favourite shows on TV, walk the dog and going out occasionally for a nice meal or to the cinema with family and friends.

## What advice would you give your 16 year old self?

You have plenty of time; do not feel pressurised to make big decisions about your future, Enjoy and appreciate the time and the things you are doing now, for you will never get that time back. Find your passion and work hard towards it. Be open to new opportunities and gain as much experience in different areas of work as you can. You do not have to go to university straight after school or even at all. There are many options for further education or working your way up through a company. As long as you enjoy what you are doing, working hard at it and becoming good at it will come easily.