

Job description

Position	Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) Nurse Specialist for Head & Neck
Grade	Band 8a (Fixed term/Secondment)
Location	The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS trust
Hours	Full Time
Responsible to	Matron
Accountable to	HON/ADON

Our Organisation

The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust (PAHT) provides a full range of general acute, outpatient and diagnostic services at The Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow, the Herts and Essex Hospital in Bishop's Stortford, and St Margaret's Hospital in Epping.

We employ 3,500 staff and serve a local population of around 350,000 people living in west Essex and east Hertfordshire, centred on the M11 corridor and the towns of Harlow, Bishop's Stortford and Epping. Our extended catchment area incorporates a population of up to 500,000 and includes the areas of Hoddesdon, Cheshunt and Broxbourne in Hertfordshire.

Our Values

The Princess Alexandra Promise to our patients as identified by our 3 values which will contribute to improving our patient experiences:

Patient at heart – Always holding the patient and their wellbeing at the centre of our thoughts and efforts

Everyday excellence – Sharing and celebrating our successes, being honest when we get it wrong, giving us the ability to learn from both

Creative collaboration – Knowing strength comes from diversity, we combine our experiences, skills and talents, working together to find new and better ways to care.

The Trust believes in investing in all our staff and rewarding high standards of care whilst building for excellence and in return we expect our staff to uphold the Trust values to the highest level.

Job summary

The Faster Diagnosis Nurse Specialist (Head & Neck) provides senior clinical and operational leadership for the Head & Neck cancer pathway, ensuring delivery of the 28-day Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) from referral to diagnosis.

The post holder will lead pathway optimisation, performance improvement, and clinical assurance for Head & Neck services, working closely with consultants, diagnostics, cancer pathway coordinators, primary care and system partners to deliver timely, equitable and high-quality cancer diagnosis.

The post holder will carry responsibility for either a defined case load or offering highly specialist service advise" this will include setting standards of care, the assessment of care needs and the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes of care, management and education. This will be achieved through the core dimensions of the role, clinical practice, leadership, acting as the patient advocate and through audit and education.



Scope and range

The Faster Diagnosis Nurse Specialist (Head & Neck) provides senior clinical and pathway leadership for the Head & Neck cancer diagnostic pathway, with Trust-wide and system influence. The role spans referral to diagnosis, ensuring delivery of the 28-day Faster Diagnosis Standard, improved patient experience and reduced diagnostic delay.

The post holder will be responsible for the clinical triage of urgent suspected Head & Neck cancer referrals, ensuring timely, appropriate allocation to diagnostic pathways in line with national guidance and local protocols. This includes assessing referral quality, clinical risk and urgency, identifying patients suitable for straight-to-test or alternative diagnostic routes, and ensuring robust safety-netting is in place.

The post holder works autonomously and collaboratively across MDTs, diagnostics, cancer performance teams, primary care and system partners. They provide expert professional leadership to CNSs and pathway staff, lead service improvement and pathway redesign, manage diagnostic risk, and contribute to governance, assurance and performance reporting.

Duties and responsibilities

Clinical and Professional Leadership

1. The post holder will clinically triage urgent suspected Head & Neck cancer referrals, ensuring referrals are directed promptly and appropriately to diagnostic pathways in accordance with national guidance and local protocols. This includes evaluating referral quality, clinical risk and urgency, identifying suitability for straight-to-test or alternative diagnostic pathways, and ensuring effective safety-netting arrangements are in place.
2. The role includes authorising and coordinating diagnostic investigations, working collaboratively with diagnostic services to optimise capacity, prioritisation and pathway flow, and prevent unnecessary delays. The post holder will have authority to request, re-prioritise or amend investigations within agreed scope of practice.
3. The post holder will lead and undertake independent nurse-led virtual clinics, providing clinical assessment, review of results, patient communication and onward pathway planning. Virtual clinics will be used to support early decision-making, reduce unnecessary face-to-face attendances, and improve compliance with the Faster Diagnosis Standard while maintaining patient safety and experience.
4. Provide expert clinical advice on Head & Neck cancer diagnostics, referral management and safety netting.
5. Support complex clinical decision making and pathway escalation to minimise diagnostic delay.
6. Promote a patient centred, equitable approach throughout the diagnostic process.
7. Practice autonomously with a high level of accountability at a specialist level in the direct delivery of high-quality care, making critical clinical decisions based on advanced clinical skills assessment.
8. With support for the Consultant, be responsible for a caseload of patients and managing nurse led review clinics.
9. Challenge practice so that the best and most appropriate treatment is given to the patient; maintaining and monitoring high standards of care, recognising and responding proactively to patients' changing clinical needs.
10. Maintain professional competence, authority and credibility by undertaking regular clinical sessions in line with your job plan and being highly visible to patients, carers and staff, actively seeking feedback about the quality of services. Collaborate in the establishment and monitoring of protocols/care pathways.



11. Actively participate in case discussions and multi-disciplinary team meetings, liaise with inter hospital departments/personnel across organisations and professional boundaries.
12. Undertake non-medical independent prescribing if required by service, in accordance with policies, current legislation and Patient Group Directions (PGD's).
13. Supervise and support junior members of staff in the delivery of patient care.
14. Identify deteriorating patients and take the appropriate action to manage the situation, liaising with the multi-disciplinary team and external care providers as appropriate.
15. Have accountability for the correct administration, usage and storage of medicines including host cost drugs according to the trust policy to include the safe administration of medicines, controlled, intravenous and cytotoxic drugs.

Governance, Risk and Quality

1. Ensure Head & Neck pathways adhere to Trust governance frameworks and national cancer standards.
2. Identify, manage and escalate risks associated with diagnostic delay and patient safety.
3. Contribute to audits, service reviews, incident investigations and assurance reporting.
4. Support regulatory, internal and external performance assurance requirements.

Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) Delivery

5. Lead delivery and assurance of the 28-day Faster Diagnosis Standard for Head & Neck pathways.
6. Monitor and analyse pathway performance data, identifying risks, delays and trends.
7. Develop and implement actions to improve pathway flow and prevent breaches.
8. Ensure robust tracking, escalation and resolution processes are in place.

Service Improvement and Transformation

9. Lead Head & Neck pathway redesign and service improvement initiatives in line with national cancer policy and NICE guidance.
10. Apply quality improvement methodologies to drive sustainable change.
11. Support implementation of new diagnostic models, including one-stop and straight-to-test pathways.
12. Contribute to Trust-wide and system-level early cancer diagnosis programmes.

Multidisciplinary and System Working

13. Work collaboratively with Head & Neck consultants, MDTs, diagnostics, cancer performance teams and primary care.
14. Represent nursing and pathway interests at MDTs, pathway boards and performance meetings.
15. Build effective relationships across organisational and system boundaries, including Cancer Alliance and ICS partners.

Workforce Leadership and Development

16. Provide professional leadership, supervision and expert support to Band 6–7 CNSs and pathway staff.
17. Lead education and development related to Faster Diagnosis Standards, referral quality and pathway safety.
18. Support workforce planning, succession and role development within Head & Neck cancer nursing.

Communication and Leadership

19. Communicate complex clinical, performance and pathway information effectively to a wide range of stakeholders.
20. Provide visible clinical leadership in high-pressure environments and act as an advocate for patients, staff and service improvement.



This job description may be subject to change according to the varying needs of the service. Such changes will be made after discussion between the post holder and the manager. All duties must be carried out under supervision or within Trust policy and procedure.

Person specification

Position	Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS) Nurse Specialist for Head & Neck
Grade	Band 8a

Evidence for suitability in the role will be measured via a mixture of application form, testing and interview. Essential: E Desirable: D

Trust values	
Patient at heart – Always holding the patient and their wellbeing at the centre of our thoughts and efforts	E
Everyday excellence – Sharing and celebrating our successes, being honest when we get it wrong, giving us the ability to learn from both	E
Creative collaboration – Knowing strength comes from diversity, we combine our experiences, skills and talents, working together to find new and better ways to care	E

Education and qualifications	
Registered Nurse with current NMC registration	E
Leadership course	E
Degree-level qualification in Nursing or equivalent professional qualification	E
Evidence of postgraduate study or equivalent experience in a relevant field (e.g. cancer care, leadership, advanced clinical practice, service improvement)	E
Ongoing commitment to continuing professional development (CPD)	E
Master's degree (or working towards) in a relevant subject such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cancer Nursing ➤ Advanced Clinical Practice ➤ Leadership / Management ➤ Health Service Improvement 	D
Recognised qualification or formal training in Cancer care or oncology nursing	E
Recognised qualification or formal training in Quality improvement or change management	D
Recognised qualification or formal training in Coaching, mentoring or clinical supervision	E
Evidence of education or training related to early cancer diagnosis or diagnostic pathways	D

Experience



Significant post-registration experience in cancer nursing, diagnostic pathways or Head & Neck services	E
Demonstrable experience working at Band 7 or equivalent senior level Proven experience of managing or influencing cancer pathways, ideally from referral to diagnosis	E
Experience of delivering or supporting compliance with national cancer standards, including the Faster Diagnosis Standard	E
Evidence of service improvement, pathway redesign or change management, using data to drive improvement	D
Experience of working collaboratively within multidisciplinary teams, including medical, diagnostic and operational staff	E
Experience of managing complex clinical and operational issues in a high-pressure environment	E
Experience of professional leadership, supervision or support of nursing or pathway staff	E
Experience of working across organisational or system boundaries, including Cancer Alliance or ICS settings	D
Involvement in performance management, audit, or assurance reporting related to cancer services	D
Experience of education, coaching or mentoring of clinical staff	E
Involvement in development or delivery of early cancer diagnosis initiatives, such as straight-to-test or one-stop clinics	D

Skills and knowledge

Advanced specialist knowledge of cancer diagnostic pathways, with detailed understanding of the Head & Neck cancer pathway	E
In-depth knowledge of the 28-day Faster Diagnosis Standard, national cancer targets and performance requirements	E
Strong understanding of national cancer policy, NICE guidance and NHSE early diagnosis priorities	E
Advanced clinical knowledge to support complex decision-making, escalation and safety-netting within diagnostic pathways	E
Ability to interpret, analyse and use performance and pathway data to identify risk, delay and opportunities for improvement	E
Sound understanding of clinical governance, risk management and patient safety principles related to diagnostic delay	E
Commitment to patient-centred care, equality, diversity and reducing health inequalities	E

Personal qualities

Professional, credible and confident, with the ability to inspire trust and lead at senior level	E
Resilient and emotionally intelligent, able to manage complex and sensitive situations	E
Highly organised and adaptable, with the ability to balance competing priorities	E
Proactive and solutions-focused, driving improvement and innovation	E
Collaborative and inclusive, building effective relationships across disciplines and organisations	E
Patient-focused, with a strong commitment to safety, equity and quality of care	E