Accomplished Business Admin apprentice ‘has potential to be the practice manager’

Twenty-one-year-old Chris Hague’s first apprenticeship happened purely by chance: he was working as an Assistant Administrator at the Emmett Carr GP surgery in Renishaw when the executive director of a local healthcare training provider stopped by for a routine appointment.

Fast forward 12 months, and Chris is now halfway through his Business Admin Level 3 programme, a pathway that could eventually see him becoming the surgery’s next practice manager.

He’s laying the groundwork already – stretching beyond the usual parameters of his role, Chris networks at sector events, designs publications and posters, manages a section of the Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) and can speak with confidence about the surgery’s Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections.

John North of In Touch Care was impressed with the personable manner of the ‘smiley gentleman on reception’ and his handling of one particularly difficult patient.

‘She later contacted the practice manager to say how well she thought I dealt with the patient, and also how well I coped on reception on an exceptionally busy day,’ said Chris.

Carrying out fundamental duties

At work, he says, no two days are the same. His responsibilities include essential tasks that keep a busy general practice operating smoothly, such as patient deductions, record amendments, clinical reporting and taking minutes for practice and patient participation group meetings – but all this can change instantly, depending on the needs of the doctors and the managers.

Making the most of the experience

For Chris, the prospect of doing an apprenticeship offered more rewards than just a pay packet.

‘I thought an apprenticeship would be ideal for me, as I would be learning about the position I was working in, whilst gaining experience in the workplace at the same time – and there would be a recognised qualification at the end of it,’ said Chris.

He fulfilled the necessary criteria to begin a Level 3 framework (most apprentices start at the intermediary Level 2), and set forth on his training, claiming the title of the surgery’s first-ever apprentice.

‘My colleagues are fantastic and very supportive of my apprenticeship, it’s like working with one big family. The doctors are also very encouraging of my course.’

Janet North
Enthusiastic learning

Chris also manages a section of the QOF, and designs publications for the practice, such as leaflets, newsletters, posters and information flyers for the waiting room area.

In addition to that, he, along with the practice manager, Stella, is heavily involved with the CQC inspections. Chris has also been attending sector events, mixing with other practice managers and listening to various points of view from people working in different organisations.

Jo and Chris’s assessor, Rachael Baxter, have both been impressed with what he has achieved so far. ‘Chris said he was going to write a report on the progress he’s made,’ said Rachael. ‘He’s definitely become a lot more confident since starting his apprenticeship, and he’s really looking to progress.’

‘Organisation is key on an apprenticeship, but the most important quality in an apprentice, I believe, is enthusiasm.’ Chris

‘I don’t think I’ve seen anywhere before an apprentice so involved with CQC inspections,’ added Jo. ‘The Care Quality Commission and their inspection regime has only recently started in dental and GP practices, and Chris has been at the forefront of it happening. This knowledge will be a key asset in becoming a practice manager in the future.’

‘I go every second month to a patient participation group meeting at the practice. Chris is always taking the minutes at the meeting, and he contributes way more than is expected from a Business Admin student in relation to how the practice is run, what they’re doing with all the surveys. I really think he’s got the potential to be a practice manager in the future.’

A solid work-life balance

In order to succeed as an apprentice, though, Chris says two traits are essential.

‘Organisation is key on an apprenticeship,’ he said. ‘But the most important quality in an apprentice, I believe, is enthusiasm. If you don’t have enthusiasm for what you’re doing, then I don’t believe you are able to work to your full potential and achieve what you want to achieve. I believe this is the reason I am doing so well at my job and my apprenticeship - I enjoy what I am doing and have a genuine enthusiasm for it.’

It’s an approach that has been working well for him, professionally and personally.

‘Currently, my studies are running perfectly alongside my work load,’ said Chris. ‘I also have a busy social life - going to the cinema, or going out for meals, or around town with friends, and sometimes weekends away.

‘Surprisingly, the course hasn’t affected my social life at all, which I am very happy about. I find it’s all about planning - if you don’t leave your coursework to the last minute and, like me, set yourself a half a day or a day [a week to complete each assignment], then there is no reason you can’t continue with your regular work and social life as normal.’

Looking ahead to more training

Does Chris have any advice for other young people who are interested in starting an apprenticeship?

‘Do it! There are so many companies requesting previous experience in the job description now, as well as a qualification,’ he said. ‘An apprenticeship is the perfect way of gaining experience in the work you wish to go into, as well as learning about the work and you’re earning money at the same time.’

‘Going to go places’

As for Chris’s future plans, after his first apprenticeship ends, he would like to progress on to Level 4 NVQ in Business Administration and ‘further [his] knowledge and work performance in this area’.

According to those who have seen him at work, Chris’s future will continue on an upward trajectory.

‘Jo added I’m sure he’ll go far. As Rachael has said before, we should definitely put him forward for the Apprenticeship Awards next year. I’m sure he could go beyond the regional event.

‘Finalists have to appear on a platform with one of the ministers and hold their own in front of a big audience. Chris definitely has got the wherewithal to do that. I think he’s going to go places.’

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