

Mammography Associate Practitioner Case Study

Shireen Barker, Mammography Associate (MA) at St George's Hospital, qualified as an MA via the Level 4 Apprenticeship in 2022. Shireen describes her route to becoming an MA and a typical day.

What did you do before you became a Mammography Associate?

Before I started my Associate Practitioner training, I had a varied career background that centred around client facing roles and customer service. My roles included working as cabin crew for an international airline and as a Donor Care Supervisor for the National Blood Service before I decided to take a career break after having children. I'd always been interested in women's healthcare, volunteering on the maternity unit after my children were born, so when a friend had undertaken the MA apprenticeship and really enjoyed it, I decided to look for similar opportunities.



How did you find the apprenticeship training?

I found the MA training really interesting – I loved learning new skills. The academic training was well-structured and I felt well-supported.

The majority of my training was spent working alongside senior colleagues at St George's learning on-the-job and after a few months, I was able to undertake mammograms independently, under radiographer supervision. Working part time, I qualified as an MA after 18 months.

What does your average day look like?

Now, my working week varies between working on satellite breast screening sites and at the breast unit at St George's, performing routine screening mammograms on well woman between the ages of 50-70.

My typical day in clinic starts with a morning briefing where we run through the day. I then undertake all the quality control checks on all the mammography machines in the department, to ensure they're working safely within specified parameters.

Then it's to the clinic where I review the list of clients, checking that their previous images are all in order, so we are ready to make a prompt start when the clients start arriving. I perform mammograms for the rest of the day, and we see around 40 clients across the morning and afternoon. Many of the women we see in clinic are understandably anxious and I enjoy making the experience as comfortable as possible for them – that's a very rewarding part of the job.

When I'm working in the static breast screening clinics, I interact with between 30-50 clients per day which includes checking their 3-point ID check, clinical history and obtaining informed consent and then performing mammograms, sharing the work between myself and my colleague. I enjoy the varied role, travelling to different sites across Southwest London serving diverse demographics.

What value do you think the role adds to the department?

I feel a really valued member of the breast care multidisciplinary team. Our work and focus on mammograms enables the radiographers to undertake more complex tasks.

I'm so glad I made the decision to become an MA. It's a really interesting rewarding role, where I feel I am making a real difference to my colleagues in the department and our clients.

I have also had the opportunity to contribute to a national employment video for London that has been amended for national use and would recommend anyone interesting in pursuing a career in breast screening to consider becoming an MA too.