

Case study



A portfolio career

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About Dr. Sally

When Dr. Sally graduated as an occupational therapist, she thought she wanted to work in community mental health services. However, the opportunity to cover a maternity leave role in children services started her on a path of learning and development in that area which continues to this day.

Over three decades later Dr. Sally finds herself with a portfolio career that enables her to work as a clinician in children services, as a Professional Advisor for RCOT, as a Trustee for a national charity and previously as a Specialist Consultant for the BBC, just a few of the roles and responsibilities that Dr. Sally holds.

Dr. Sally shares her reflections on the factors that have given her the skills and confidence to work in a range of organisations and roles.

‘You need to keep your options open, and in terms of moving around, I think we need to invest in ourselves. Create opportunities to shadow someone or job swap for a week so that you can see things that are different’.

“If something excites you and scares you at the same time that's the time to go for it”.

Career challenges and opportunities

Throughout her career Dr. Sally has taken the opportunity to try new things and to grasp the nettle when it comes to learning and development. It was her “need for something interesting in my life”, that spurred her on to complete her MSc and then her PhD.

As a lifelong learner, Dr. Sally believes that you need to be open to new possibilities and to try things out. She has been fortunate to be able to take risks and to work part-time, but she would encourage everyone to look for learning and development opportunities.

Dr. Sally's years of experience in the NHS as a manager and clinician not only provided her with valuable transferrable skills but also training and credibility to work across organisations.

‘I can do the role that I do in the school because they know what they're getting, they're getting somebody who's got that level of training. They know that I have knowledge about safeguarding, confidentiality, record-keeping and manual handling because that's what comes with my NHS role’.

Dr. Sally continues to practice as a clinician in the NHS which she finds invaluable in supporting many of her other roles.

'It gives me credibility not only with RCOT members but with stakeholders, I can talk to ministers and government and commissioners about a child or young person I've seen in practice recently'.

Working in multiple roles can be challenging so good organisational skills and having clear boundaries for the work is helpful. Clarity of roles enables Dr. Sally to respect the boundaries and confidentiality required to work across organisations. Her multiple roles also provides her with a unique opportunity to act as a resource for staff locally and nationally.

'Coming to RCOT was a really good opportunity for me to apply all of that knowledge, skills and experience that I'd had in the NHS and use that to benefit a much bigger range of people'.

“I wouldn't have applied for this role at RCOT had I not had those other experiences along the way”.

Career messages

- **Be open to new opportunities** – Dr. Sally's roles as a Trustee, a BBC Consultant and Scout leader have given her additional skills and confidence that she puts to good use in her work in the NHS and RCOT.

'Looking back at the things I've done outside of my NHS work, I've gained skills around business planning, working with the media, looking for and demonstrating impact. The skills and experience that I've acquired through my voluntary work as a trustee, has positioned me well for the role that I have here at RCOT'.

- **Invest in yourself** – Dr. Sally believes stepping out of your comfort zone to learn and try new things has not only given her new career opportunities but allowed her to broaden her thinking and practice.

'Don't just access resources that are relevant to your clinical area of practice but look at other information. I can remember going to an RCOT conference and going to a session on housing and it almost felt like the blinkers had come off I'd looked above the parapet...So, opening your eyes and reading other articles in the journal about other areas of practice, you can apply all of that. I think being open to possibilities and being prepared to invest in yourself are key messages'.

- **Recognise and value your transferrable skills as an OT** – taking the time to reflect on the skills and experiences you've gained both as an OT but also from voluntary work can open new doors and opportunities.

'What are your transferrable skills? Think beyond your experience as an OT, what about all the other things you do, all the skills and experiences whether helping on PTA or being a Scout leader, I think we undervalue these'.

Moving into a new role or organisation can seem daunting, but as Dr. Sally's career path demonstrates, taking opportunities to learn and develop as well as using your transferrable skills as an OT can make a real difference to you and those you work with.

'Working in the NHS, I can see the direct impact of my work with individuals and families. I get a lot from that and hope that they get something from that too. I think the other roles that I have will allow me to influence more people but in a different and less direct way, with a bigger reach'.

Does a portfolio career or working in the NHS interest you? Why not explore being seconded to a project outside your team or organise a role-swap into another area of practice one day a week.

If you're interested in a career in children's services, check out [Dr. Sally's blog](#) with some top tips.