

MEDIA RELEASE

NHS AAA Screening Programme offers exciting career opportunities

December 16, 2010 –

The only NHS national screening programme specifically for men provides exciting career opportunities in sonography for new trainees and advanced practitioners alike.

Ultrasound imaging of the aorta is the test at the heart of the NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme, which screens men aged 65 and over. Once screening is rolled out across the whole of the country, it is estimated that it will prevent up to 50% of deaths from ruptured AAA.

Scanning is carried out by screening technicians who undergo Programme specific training in imaging the aorta. Some technicians have previous sonography experience while others have no healthcare background and need training from scratch.

Najma Rashid has more than 20 years' experience both as an advanced practitioner and a trainer. She recently took on the role of Clinical Skills Trainer (CST) for the Programme in the North East of England. Najma's role as a CST is to mentor and assess the technicians in the North East, both during their initial training and their ongoing professional development.

AAA screening in the North East is based at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead and the local North East programme covers an area stretching from Harrogate in the south to the Scottish border in the north.

"I had previously only trained radiographers and other health professionals so it is a big learning experience for me and gives me a whole new perspective," said Najma. "You can't make any assumptions when you are training people who have no healthcare background; you have to start right at the beginning. The job is very demanding but also very enjoyable."

The NHS AAA Screening Programme began rolling out in the spring of 2009 and an estimated 42 local screening programmes will cover the whole of the country by 2013. Screening clinics are held in a range of locations, including health centres, GP surgeries and community hospitals.

All screening must be carried out by staff who have received Programme approved training and the University of Salford was this year appointed as the national training provider. The Ultrasound teaching team from the University of Salford now delivers all the Programme's education and training for screening technicians, sonographers and CSTs.

Under the national training scheme, it takes an estimated three to six months to become accredited as an AAA screening technician. The trainee technicians receive a combination of face-to-face classroom-based learning, e-learning and onsite clinical skills training covering topics including Key Skills, The Human Body, Science and Technique. The course is on target to be accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) in January 2011.



Meanwhile, Najma was among the first people to attend the Programme's new two-day training course for fast-tracking sonographers and CSTs. This course covers:

- The NHS AAA Screening Programme and the principles of screening
- The aorta – anatomy, pathology and treatment paths
- Scanning the aorta; measurements
- Scanning the aorta (practical)
- Mentoring and assessment
- Communication skills
- Giving feedback and having difficult conversations

“The training will help prepare me for a challenge of both my academic and clinical skills,” said Najma, formerly Programme Director of the PgC/D/MSc Medical Ultrasound course at the University of Teesside. “The trainee technicians need to feel confident and my role is to help raise their levels so they feel able to work independently.

“During the first four weeks of screening in the North East I will go out with them to every clinic. I expect them to do most of the work but they will be able to call on me when needed. I will be there to guide and help them and give them confidence.

“I have worked in GP practices as a solo practitioner so I do have an idea of the working environment outside hospitals. However, I knew very little about the programme before this job came up and my previous role in screening had been geared towards women.

“It is a huge challenge but when I paused to consider what I wanted to do for the remainder of my career I thought this was a niche I could fill nicely. I will need to call on the support of my two assessor/trainer colleagues in the ultrasound department at Queen Elizabeth Hospital but I can't wait for the screening clinics to start.”

Jan Dodgeon, Ultrasound Course Leader for the University of Salford, is excited by the challenge of delivering the new national training programme.

“We have first class ultrasound teaching facilities, exciting on-line resources and an on-site clinical skills lab equipped with seven ultrasound machines, including two portable machines from the AAA Programme,” she said. “Our team of sonographers is looking forward to delivering ultrasound education throughout the country using these portable machines and sharing our wealth of skills and experience.”

The NHS AAA Screening Programme training is only open to screening technicians and sonographers who are employed by the NHS and working within a local NHS AAA screening programme. The courses are not open to people working in the private sector and all bookings must be made directly through the National Programme Centre.

For more information on the NHS AAA Screening Programme, visit <http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk>.

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