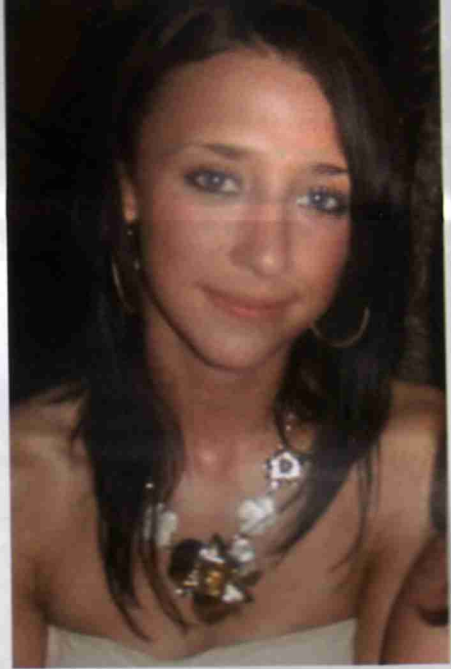


PROFILE

Louise Williams: Pursuing her dream

*Louise Williams always knew she wanted to be a practice nurse.
She spoke to Lucy Jolin about fulfilling her dream*



Ask Louise Williams the biggest challenge that she's faced since qualifying last year and the answer may surprise you. 'My age!' she laughs. 'I'm 23 but I've been told I look younger. When I was first left alone after my 6-month introductory period, all that the patients wanted to know was if I was properly trained and old enough to be a practice nurse!'

Luckily, as she becomes more of a well-known face at the practice, her age seems to matter less. 'They know I'm not a little girl who doesn't know what she's doing! I also wear a navy uniform now, which has helped tremendously to how I am perceived. While completing my introductory training, I wore a white uniform with navy trim, which marked me out as different ... it's amazing the difference it makes!'

Louise trained at Cardiff University and after qualifying last September, she was lucky enough to find a role as a practice nurse at the Rugby Surgery in Newport, Gwent, where previous to her training she had worked as an administrator and as a phlebotomist.

She had always wanted to be a practice nurse. 'I knew hospital nursing wasn't really for me. Working in the surgery before my training gave me some insight, but I've always wanted to be a practice nurse. I've been very lucky to be able to go straight into this field of nursing.'

'I really like the fact that every day is

Louise Williams is a practice nurse at
The Rugby Surgery, Newport

different. On the other hand, I like that you can really get to know your patients. I like being able to talk to patients and develop a rapport with them—it's a very holistic way of working. You can't get bored in this career either. There are many different areas you can improve your knowledge and skills, or extend your expertise, and develop in.'

Following her appointment, Louise's practice funded her to participate in the first ever 'Introduction to Practice Nursing' module at University of Glamorgan, run by Eileen Munson and Joanne Smith. She found the course, consisting of 13 study days, extremely useful in equipping her for the challenges of general practice. 'The course felt like it was designed for people like me ... You need a totally different set of skills for practice nursing, which wasn't covered in my training—though I believe Jo is looking to change this. The module consisted of a huge range of subjects, including all chronic disease management, childhood immunizations, travel health, treatment room skills and sexual health.

'I've gained a deeper insight and knowledge into the theory behind practice. There were only six of us undertaking the course—it was nice to meet other people who were new to practice, but also some who wanted more theory to improve their practice. There was one girl who was only 2 years older than me, which was nice as that gave me support with my age battle!'

Louise has also found support in her practice nursing colleagues. 'I know I've got a lot to learn. I haven't currently got a mentor as such, but I worked alongside two senior nurses in my practice, and I'm

also in touch with two experienced nurses in the area who specialize in asthma, which is great as I'm taking over the asthma clinics. Everyone who works at my practice has been very supportive too ... I'm constantly being sent for training. I start my asthma diploma module in October, which I'm very excited about. I feel it is important to mention the need to be capable to do the admin-side of practice as well, as this is increasing all the time.'

She attended this year's national practice nurse conference in Cardiff, which, she says, was a real eye-opener. 'It was the first time I realized how many of us there actually are ... it was wonderful to have the chance to network and meet other nurses, and share good practice and ideas or queries. The conference covered the clinical issues well; although I could only attend for one day, I came away with some very useful points around chronic disease management, which I'm looking forward to putting into practice. The fact it was celebrating 25 years was brilliant ... As a nurse joining this field, it was very inspiring. I will definitely be attending the next conference!'

For now, Louise is concentrating on learning as much as she possibly can, and gaining valuable hands-on experience. In the future, she aims to become a nurse prescriber. 'That's my long-term goal but I know I've got a long way to go,' she says. 'I am very excited by this talk of nurse partners as well—working as a partner alongside a GP would be fabulous. My first year has been such a steep learning curve and I've got much more to develop on, but I know this is the career for me.'