



My World

Clodagh McHugh works as an oncology nurse specialist with patients at every stage of their disease and with all types of cancer. Based at a leading teaching hospital in Dublin, she lectures on oncology nursing and is involved in drawing up safety guidelines relating to oral chemotherapy. She scored the top mark in the learning assessment test at the end of this year's ESO-EONS Masterclass for advanced oncology nurses.

■ Why I chose to work in cancer

My final placement in a year-long rotation programme after qualifying as a nurse was spent at a haematology/oncology unit. I loved the ethos there, which wholeheartedly embraced the care of the patient and family.

■ What I love most about my job

It's a privilege to work with people and families who are going through a very difficult, frightening and sometimes vulnerable time in their life. I love the autonomy I have as a clinical nurse specialist, and the diversity of my role, from supporting patients, lecturing, keeping updated on developments and working as part of a very dynamic multidisciplinary team.

■ The hardest thing about my job

As health professionals, there is so much that is out of our control. We can't make everything better, but we can try to make things easier and more manageable.

■ What I've learned about myself

Life is for living, and I try to make good use of my time off. I've learned not to take things or people around me for granted.

■ I'll never forget...

Four weeks spent in Malawi teaching nurses working in cancer. Essentials are in very short supply, which makes it hard for them to do their jobs effectively. But they are very enthusiastic about developing their service, and four nurses have enrolled in an online oncology programme. It was very challenging and overwhelming at times, but an amazing experience.

■ A high point in my career

Being selected to participate in a six-week clinical trials training programme for cancer nurses at the American NCI and being chosen to participate in the 6th ESO-EONS Masterclass for advanced oncology nurses.

■ I wish I were better at...

Time management. I find it hard to prioritise non-clinical duties over direct patient care.

■ What I value most in a colleague

I enjoy working with someone who is dynamic, patient-focused, respectful of colleagues and who can work well in a team but can also use their own initiative. I value people who take pride in their role and aim to improve

the service, and importantly people who can share a laugh.

■ The most significant advance in my specialism in recent years

In nursing, the establishment of the role of clinical nurse specialist in Ireland in 2001, focused on providing specialised care, and contributing to assessing needs and planning, delivering and evaluating care.

■ My advice to someone entering cancer nursing today would be...

Always focus on the patient and treat them as you would like to be treated. As you develop your career, focus on both your clinical knowledge and clinical experience, as each complements the other. Most importantly, make sure you have a good life/work balance.

■ What I wish I'd learned at nursing school

I wish more emphasis had been placed on interpersonal skills. Each patient has their own unique background, personality, life experience and coping mechanisms. Communication and interpersonal skills are vital in helping each patient to successfully navigate their individual cancer journey. ■