



Gemma has been working as a midwife at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust since 2008.

Gemma has shared her journey to becoming a Midwife Sonographer and has provided advice to anyone considering a career in a midwifery setting.

How did you get into your current role as a Midwife Sonographer?

My journey has been a long and twisted one. After completing my GCSEs I began studying for my A-Levels, in which I studied Media, Sociology, English Literature and Art. I had no real idea of what I wanted to do for a career and hadn't given my future much of a thought. Following my A-Levels I had completely fallen in love with design and photography, and got an Apprenticeship with a Graphic Design studio. Once I had completed my Apprenticeship, I started work at an international American portrait studio. I initially started this role in the sales department but eventually convinced them to train me in portrait photography.

Whilst working I decided that I could put my people skills to better use and after a regular family at the portrait studio lost their 3 year old son to cancer (I had photographed their baby every 3 months since he was born) I felt I had a calling to become a Paediatric Nurse.

As I had no childcare background I found it difficult to get into Paediatric Nursing, but following several UEA interviews a Nurse Lecturer convinced me to take a place on the Adult Nursing course, which allowed me to change to Paediatric Nursing in my final year. I continued working full-time whilst studying for my degree for the next 3 years. It was a long and exhausting journey but I loved it. Surprisingly I loved District Nursing and Gynaecology the most. Following the completion of my degree I left my job as a manager at the photography studio and began working as a full-time Nurse.

Shortly after this I was offered a full-time job in the Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit. Around the same time (after researching into the Maternity side of healthcare) I was also offered a space on the 18 month midwifery course. It was a paid placement and another degree so I thought this was a now or never opportunity and I went for it!

With another degree under my belt I started on the Delivery floor, rotating throughout the departments and loving every moment. Following the birth of my daughter I found that being a Delivery floor midwife caused too much of a work/life imbalance and instead joined the Community Midwifery team where I worked for 10 years.

In 2017, I temporarily covered a position in the Breech Clinic in Antenatal Clinic every Friday. I became very interested in this role and spent extra hours observing a Midwife who specialised in Ultrasound. I found this fascinating and by pure chance the department had the money to train another midwife and an advert was placed to apply. The course was at a Master's Degree level at Sheffield Hallam University. I applied and was offered the position as a Trainee Midwife Sonographer!

I qualified in June 2019 following 18 months of study, exams, dissertation and 100 hours of scanning. Myself and my colleague Chloe now provide a Midwife led Ultrasound Clinic every week. It combines all that I love; imaging, holistic and individual care, recording, reporting and evaluating the Ultrasound scan as well as educating and supporting pregnant women. To ensure they get the best and safest care is my dream job.

What challenges have you faced during your role?

My role, like in all nursing and midwifery roles, faces different challenges every day by solving and resolving problems with patients and prioritising care and our workloads. The most unexpected challenge I have faced within my specialist role is that often I feel out of place. My role blends two specialities, so I feel I'm not 100% one role or the other!



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of place. My role blends two specialities, so I feel I'm not 100% one role or the other! I have discovered this is quite common when undertaking a specialist role, and I feel the biggest way to solve this is by showing and educating people about my role. I have offered students, midwives, doctors, and radiographers the opportunity to observe my Clinic to see what's involved and how I provide care for our patients.

What is your favourite part of your job?

The women get my full attention and time. I work by appointment, and for that 30 minutes they are my focus. I scan the babies and assess the uterine environment. These women are at a high risk of Intrauterine Growth Restriction, which if it occurs can lead to stillbirth if not timely delivered. Although at times diagnosis is distressing, ultimately I save babies lives. I see my women regularly throughout their pregnancies and have a huge opportunity to provide health care promotion. It is so rewarding when a woman gives up smoking after talking with me, and I am able to counsel and provide nicotine replacement which means small and poorly babies can dramatically jump out of the danger zone once a mother ceases smoking. As well as health assessments, I love watching the baby in utero, how they move and touch their faces. This allows the perfect time for me to share this with parents, increase bonding, discuss healthy lifestyle choices and aid in preparing for parenthood. I love providing parents with facts such as how their baby can dream, hear, and cry—I can literally see the mothers falling in love with their babies as they watch on screen.

What surprised you//what were you unaware of until you began working in your job?

After working as a midwife for over 13 years I am surprised at how much more I have learnt. In this world you never stop learning and you continue to progress every day. Every pregnancy is as individual as the person, and the advances in science and technology never stop. I was surprised and massively challenged by the Ultrasound course, it was the hardest but most rewarding thing I have ever done. Learning about Ultrasound was like learning a new language but the Radiographers (and hopefully now me) make it look easy.

What would you tell someone who is considering a career in a Midwifery setting?

This career is so diverse and the pathways are endless. I advise taking all of the learning opportunities and gain as much experience as possible because you may be surprised at what you love doing. I never knew my role existed, and whilst it isn't easy you will learn, grow, and evolve. No two days are ever the same and you will never be bored. I have never regretted the decision to become a Midwife.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time? What would you like to achieve?

In 10 years time my children will be grown up. I will be full time and I'm sure I will still be scanning babies! I hope to complete my Master's Degree in 1st and 2nd Trimester. I hope in 10 years time Midwife Sonographers will be commonplace and fundamental to midwifery!

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