Introducing the band 4 assistant practitioner role in haemodialysis

What was the problem?
Haemodialysis is routinely offered in outpatient units close to the patient’s home, but the service cannot rely on temporary staff if shortfalls occur due to workforce turnover, absence or unplanned leave: adequate staff and skill mix are vital.

What was the solution?
The trust commissioned a two-year education and training programme at foundation degree level for band 3 clinical support workers to become band 4 assistant practitioners (APs) in haemodialysis. This freed registered nurses from the more repetitive, labour-intensive, technical procedures to concentrate on safe care and developments such as home dialysis.

What were the results?
- Ten qualified APs now work in dialysis, including one in a renal education and training post.
- The service supports one AP trainee per year to maintain its target of 5%.
- Savings are £40,000 a year, comparing an AP at band 4 with a band 5 registered nurse.
- Vacancies in the renal workforce are 7%; without the APs they would be 15%.
- In monthly surveys 95% of patients say they ‘would recommend’ the service last year.
- The role has helped increase activity by 1,050 dialysis sessions over eight years, equating to 10 extra patients a year.
- No serious incidents or near misses have resulted from introducing the AP role.

What were the learning points?
- This staffing model has effectively and efficiently maintained patient and staff safety.
- Dialysis-dependent patients from the Lister Kidney Patient Association took their first holiday abroad accompanied by a senior nurse practitioner and AP to supervise their dialysis.