

Ten Questions about being an advanced practice physiotherapist

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1. Please describe briefly your job role and responsibilities

- Currently I work as a band 7 MSK Physiotherapist in a busy Outpatient department and also as an FCP in the ED department.
- I help lead a team of band 6 and 5 physios which involves regular clinical reasoning sessions and in-service training to help with the development of the teams clinical skills and knowledge.
- My advanced practice role currently involves carrying out joint and soft tissue injections. In ED I assess and manage patients presenting to the department with acute injuries and trauma. This often involves requesting medical imaging and being able to interpret the results to help formulate a diagnosis.
- I am due to start a new role as an FCP in Primary Care. This is a new service in the Southern Trust area so initially part of my role will involve helping with the set-up of the service as well as clinically working in a GP practice assessing, diagnosing, treating and signposting patients with MSK problems.

2. Please describe briefly your career pathway so far

- I graduated from the University of Ulster in 2006.
- Initially I worked for 6 months as a research assistant at the University before starting a Band 5 rotational post in November 2006 in the Southern Trust whereby I gained experience across a range of clinical setting including MSK, medical/respiratory, surgical

and neuro rehab. I then advanced to a rotational 6 post in 2010 completing rotations in MSK, paediatrics and community neuro rehab.

- I became a static MSK band 6 in 2013 primarily working in fracture clinic and outpatient rehab of patients post fracture and trauma surgery.
- In 2016 started my current post as an advanced clinical specialist in MSK.

3. Have you completed any postgraduate education courses relevant to your role?

- Yes, I have completed two masters modules in advanced practice and I am currently working my way towards completing my master in Physiotherapy.
- I have completed a PG Cert in Independent and Supplementary Non-Medical Prescribing.
- I have completed training in Joint and Soft Tissue Injections.
- I have completed several other advanced level course including Red flags and Spinal Masqueraders, Interpreting Blood results for Physiotherapist and Musculoskeletal Radiology.

- What have been the challenges in achieving advanced level practice?

- In the early part of my career I struggled with the lack of opportunities for career-progression. This was frustrating for me as although I had gained the required level of experience and skills, the lack of job opportunities in Northern Ireland left me feeling stagnated.
- Lately the challenges have been gaining a good work life balance between coping with the demands of having a young family while working full-time and completing post-graduate training requires to work at an advanced practice level.

4. What advice would you give to a new graduate keen to develop as an advanced practice level physiotherapist?

- I believe it's important to have a wide breadth of experience across a range of clinical settings which is primarily achieved through rotational experience.
- This helps offer a broad depth of knowledge for working at an advanced practice level when clinically reasoning complex patient presentations as often MSK presentations can mask underlying neurological or sinister pathology.
- I believe regular clinical reflection has been an important learning tool for me to help identity both positive and negative experiences and to learn and develop from them to help advance my practice.

5. What personal qualities/characteristics are important to have for your role as an advanced practice physiotherapist?

- I am a logical thinker and that helps me to clinically reason difficult presentations.
- I make time for colleagues to help discuss caseloads and enjoy teaching/sharing my knowledge.

- Every day I challenge myself in terms of my own clinical practice and how I can improve for the benefit of my patients and the service.
- Its important to look after you own mental health and well being and I do this by spending time with my family and getting to the gym regularly.
- This helps me to focus on my work and allows me to cope with the stress that working at an advanced practice level can present.

6. How to do measure your effectiveness as an advanced practice level physio?

- For the team of injecting physios in our Trust I developed an electronic database to record patient outcome pre and post injection. This has allowed me to audit our results over the past two years and identify areas for improvement and skill development, which has influenced our planned learning & CPD.
- I introduced the MSK-HQ PROM across MSK outpatient departments to record pre and post treatment outcomes. I also developed an electronic database from which we can audit our outcomes and evaluate our service. I presented this service improvement project at a quality improvement event in our trust.
- I regularly engage in patient and public involvement (PPI) to gain feedback from service users to help advance the services we provide.

7. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

- As I am just about to start my new role in Primary Care so it is hard for me to looking beyond that for the time being.

9. What type of CPD activities do you do at this level?

- I lead weekly in-service training and clinical reasoning sessions with our team of MSK physios.
- I attend injection supervision 3x a year during which we review/update current EBP and changes in practice.
- I attend non-medical prescribing x 2 per year discussing medicines management issues and changes to prescribing practice. I also sign up to receive MHRA drug safety alerts to identify any safety issues with regards to my prescribing.
- Twice a year the FCPs working in ED have a clinical reasoning and skills workshop.
- I actively read medical journal to keep up to date with EBP in the areas of MSK, injection therapy and NMP.
- I engage in the iCSP clinical interest groups in MSK, injection, NMP & FCP. I also use Twitter as a useful resource and networking tool.
- In my PDP this year I plan to advance my diagnostic skills in the interpretation of medical imaging.
- I plan this year to attend the CSP conference in November.

10. What would be your 3 top tips to an experienced Physiotherapist keen to develop as an advanced practice physio?

- Reflect on your clinical practice every day and challenge yourself to see how you could improve or do things better.
- Focus on developing the clinical skills that will make the biggest difference for your patients.
- Always listen to your patients as they have the answers.