

Ten Questions about being an advanced practice physiotherapist

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1. Please describe briefly your job role and responsibilities.

- I have been one of the Lead Advanced Practice Physiotherapists (Paediatric Orthopaedics) in NHS Fife since 2016 when the service was redesigned following the retirement of the Paediatric Orthopaedic Physician. The Paediatric Orthopaedic service is primarily led and delivered by 2 WTE Band 8a Advanced Physiotherapy Practitioners (APP) with the support of Orthopaedic and Radiology Consultants from The Royal Hospital Sick Children (RHSC) Edinburgh.
- My remit covers running independent clinics for routine referrals to the Paediatric Orthopaedic clinic as well as being responsible for vetting, clinic management, service development and quality improvement projects. In addition, I also manage the orthopaedic needs of children with neurodisability to include assessment, diagnosis and management of focal spasticity.
- I also have a leadership and education role within the Children and young people (CYP) community team

2. Please describe briefly your career pathway so far

- I qualified as a Physical Therapist from St Louis University, Missouri in 1989.
- I joined Voluntary Missionary Movement in 1991 and worked in Harare, Zimbabwe until 1993 at St. Giles Rehabilitation Centre.
- I moved to Scotland in 1995, working as part of the community paediatric physiotherapy team.

- I moved into a Clinical Specialist post in 2008. The following year, as part of that post, I was asked to establish a physiotherapist led dedicated focal spasticity service, to include injecting, for our children and young people (CYP) with neurodisability in Fife.
 - I undertook an MSc module in Botulinum Toxin & Spasticity Management from York St John University. My project from this was published in the APCP journal in 2010.
 - I have been an independent injector of Botulinum Toxin-A (BoNT-A) since 2010 and was the first paediatric physiotherapist in Scotland to do this.
 - In addition to the monthly injection clinics I have been doing since 2009, I have been responsible for the overall orthopaedic service for CYP with neurodisability in Fife since 2012.
 - I have my own orthopaedic motor disorder clinics which run weekly and work closely with orthopaedic colleagues at RHSC Edinburgh for surgical opinions/management of issues that cannot be dealt with conservatively.
 - I do a Joint Motor Disorder Clinic with a consultant paediatric neurology colleague from RHSC Edinburgh on a monthly basis.

 - In addition to my day-to-day work, I am involved in several national groups.
 - I have supported other Board areas (Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow & Clyde) in development of paediatric physiotherapy led focal spasticity management services. Together we established the Scottish Paediatric Physiotherapy Injectors (SPPI) group in 2016.
 - I have been involved with the Cerebral Palsy Integrated Pathway Scotland (CPIPS) since 2011 and am the lead for Fife.
 - I have been a member of the APCP Neurodisability group since 2014 and am the current Chair. As a member of the Neurodisability group, I helped organised the 1st study day in 2015 to establish CPIPS within the other UK countries. I have been on the Cerebral Palsy Integrated Pathway National Network since 2016 and am a past Chair.
 - I was awarded a Fellowship from the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP) in 2018 in recognition of my contribution to paediatric physiotherapy.
 - Through the Neurodisability group, I led on a APCP member survey in 2018 of paediatric physiotherapist injectors. From the survey a national support network for paediatric physiotherapy injectors was set up. In 2019, British Neurotoxin Network invited us to establish British Neurotoxin Network Paediatrics. We had our first conference in September 2019. I am one of the Board members.
 - I was awarded a BSCOS Affiliate travel bursary in 2020 to allow me to visit other centres where Paediatric Physiotherapists manage focal spasticity.
3. Have you completed any postgraduate education courses relevant to your role?
- Clinical Leadership course – NHS Fife 2018-2019
 - I helped organise and then attended a day course at St Andrew's University in 2017 for the SPPI to review anatomy (through cadaver work) and US injection techniques.
 - I have attended several courses on use of BoNT-A in Paediatrics through Allergan, Inc. (2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015). I have also participated in an advisory board meeting of paediatric spasticity with Merz Pharmaceuticals in relation to licensing of their BoNT-A product for use in CYP with cerebral palsy (June 2019).
 - MSc (Dist) Advanced Practice (Medical Imaging) University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, 2013

- Orthopaedic Medicine International Certificate, 2007
- Bobath (NDT) qualified in Paediatrics, 1998
- Post Graduate Diploma in Lower Limb Orthotic Biomechanics
- University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland, 1998

4. What have been the challenges in achieving advanced level practice?

Advanced Practice Physiotherapy posts within Paediatrics are uncommon in Scotland, particularly in the area of general orthopaedics, neurodisability and injecting. It has often felt like uncharted territory at times which can be exciting and challenging but also lots of work.

As there are so few of us, peer support can be hard to find and the post can feel quite isolated at times.

Achieving an advanced level of practice takes of time, dedication and hard work. Courses, shadowing, self-learning often occurs outside of normal working hours and funding needs to be found.

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

A wide base of core knowledge is essential. Take the time to develop as a therapist. Experience, good communication and willingness to learn are just as important as qualifications. You need to be qualified as well as ambitious. Be brave. Learn to ask for help not only clinically but in terms of career progression and mentorship.

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

To achieve an advanced practice role you need drive, determination, communication, leadership, and to be passionate about patient care and the role physiotherapy can play. You also should have a good sense of humour and the ability to admit when things don't go right. To be good at what you do with your skills, you must have empathy and compassion for your patients and families. Be real. Be relatable.

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

That can be difficult as it depends on what is meant in terms of being effective. I formally review waiting list and audit the service. My main measure is how the CYP and families respond to my input. If I can help them achieve their outcomes, I am being effective. I also look for positive feedback from colleagues, PDP and peer review

8. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

In 5 yrs time, I will be 2yrs away from retirement. I say this as I will likely still be in my APP role in Fife but would hope to have been involved in increasing the numbers of Paediatric APPs and possibly roles at Consultant level. There are currently no Consultant Paediatric Physiotherapists in Scotland and I think we have a significant role to play in future workforce planning. We are good at doing the work but not as good at demonstrating impact and pushing forward boundaries as AHPs.

I would hope to have developed my role more to support other physiotherapists working towards or within an APP/Consultant role.

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

NHS Education Scotland has excellent guidance on working career framework for advanced practice level. I use the 4 pillars of practice (clinical practice, leadership, facilitation of learning and evidence research and development) to design my CPD activities each year.

Continuing professional development is not just about going on courses which can be hard to find at an advanced level. I will obviously need to maintain my clinical practice but there is much scope for developing in the other areas.

I have set up alerts for relevant areas of research. I am on a few national committees. I have peer review through SPPI mentioned previously. I try to attend network APP meetings but also attend other relevant meetings regionally or nationally.

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

1. Experience only comes with time – there are no shortcuts
2. Know the basics and know them well – anatomy/physiology
3. Make links with people who know more than you – find someone you can ask, who can teach you and is willing to help