

Ten Questions about being an advanced practice physiotherapist

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1. Please describe briefly your job role and responsibilities

I am fortunate to have several jobs that allow me to use my skills and experience in different ways. My main job is orthogeriatric advanced clinical practitioner (ACP) at South Warwickshire Foundation Trust (SWFT); a combined acute and community Trust. I am currently on secondment as simulation and clinical skills lead.

I also work as an hourly paid lecturer at Coventry University teaching the undergraduate physiotherapists, as a specialist advisor for the Care Quality Commission and as community tutor teaching Warwick University's medical students in conjunction with SWFT.

2. Please describe briefly your career pathway so far

My journey to advanced practice has not been very linear.

- I qualified in 2000 and undertook junior rotations, progression to senior 2 then to senior 1 physiotherapist.
- In 2006 I saw a community matron post and thought that, even though it was advertised for nurses only, with some training I would be able to do that. I loved this role and realised it was the right career pathway for me.
- Due to my husband's work we had to move, and I could not find a similar role; so, I worked as a physiotherapist in an intermediate care team and then a specialist community falls service.

- In 2010 I took a falls prevention lead post, working in acute and community hospitals. Working as part of the corporate nursing team, I learnt a lot about quality improvement methodology and teaching and used my advanced practice skills when assessing patients that had fallen. I undertook my independent prescribing course and stayed in this role until 2016 when I stated working as an orthogeriatric ACP.
- I joined the British Geriatric Society's (BGS) Nurse and AHP council while working in my falls prevention lead post. I found the advice and support from others in the council invaluable and with their encouragement I joined the BGS's Clinical Quality committee. This was a springboard to give me the experience and confidence to apply for other opportunities; such as the CSP's Professional Committee and the BGS's Education and Training committee.

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

I have always been keen to learn and am passionate about educating others and myself. When I started working as a community matron, I started an advanced practice long-term conditions masters; having to finish it at PGDip level due to moving house and jobs. Alongside this, I also undertook courses in COPD and spirometry. I completed my dissertation last year to top up my PGDip to an MSc.

I studied a masters level falls module, became an independent prescriber, completed a quality service improvement and redesign course and an education and training qualification while working in my falls prevention lead post. I loved the 90 hours supervised practice that was part of the prescribing course.

An amazing geriatrician; Dr. Parul Shah taught me some extremely valuable lessons and I hear myself repeating her phrases when I teach.

The education and training course I undertook fundamentally changed the way I teach; I wish I had done this much earlier in my career. The quality service improvement and redesign course gave me the tools I need to implement organisation wide change. I loved this so much I completed their college accreditation programme and now teach this to others.

I have recently completed an end point assessor course, so I hope that I will be using that to assess ACPs, physiotherapists and assistant practitioners at the end of their apprenticeships.

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

Historically not all organisations were willing to consider physiotherapists for advanced practice roles; although this is changing, and it is now much easier to find adverts open to physiotherapists. Back in 2006 when I became community matron it was difficult to find other physiotherapists in a similar role for mentorship and support. I realise there were others doing the role back then, but it wasn't always easy to find each other. Undertaking all the study required to become an advanced level practitioner and to stay at that level can be challenging. Trying to balance work and home life was challenging for me when my children were small; they're 9 and 12 now so it's much easier than it used to be.

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

- Don't give up, there will be setbacks and it will be tough at times but if you really want it hang in there, it is worth it in the end.
- Find someone to talk to who understands the journey you are on; its rewards and challenges, and talk to them regularly. This might be someone at your work, in a special interest group, or via the CSP's mentoring scheme.
- If there is a job you want that is not advertised to physiotherapists, but you feel you have the skills required then challenge it; phone them up and convince them.
- Shadow others, it will provide not just education but inspiration.

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

I think it's important to be open about what you know and are confident and competent to do; but more importantly what you are not confident and competent to do. I think you need to be driven, keen to develop yourself and those around you and eager to make things better for patients and staff.

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

For me the most important measure of my effectiveness is whether the patient is happy. I always think, did my intervention help them to achieve what they wanted?

8. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

That's a difficult question; I miss not seeing patients every day while I am on my secondment, but for health reasons going back to full time clinical work is not an option at present. I love quality improvement, teaching and working on national committees to influence change; so something that incorporates these things would be great.

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

I find that preparing my teaching material forces me to keep up to date and develop. I also listen to the MDTea podcast; a free podcast for those working with older people run by Dr Jo Preston and Dr Iain Wilkinson. I attend conferences; PTUK and the British Geriatric Society's regional and national conferences. I shadow colleagues who are working clinically to try to keep up to date and remind me of the joys (and challenges) of working in a clinical environment.

10. What would be your 3 top tips to an experienced Physiotherapist keen to develop as an Advanced practice physiotherapists.

1. Join a special interest group or society that aligns with the role you will be in. A lot of them run conferences and offer educational grants.
2. Speak to experienced advanced practice physiotherapists, their support will be invaluable as you start to question your professional identity and wonder is it worth it (in case you are wondering...it is worth it 😊).
3. Shadow others, seeing them in the role will help you plan your learning but will inspire and re-energise you.