

Profession: Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists help and treat people of all ages with physical problems caused by illness, accident or ageing, finding ways to improve activity levels and relieve pain. Physiotherapy is a healthcare profession that works with people to identify and maximise their ability to move and function. Functional movement is a key part of what it means to be healthy. This means that physiotherapy plays a key role in enabling people to improve their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

The core skills physiotherapists employ include exercises (for breathing, strengthening, stretching, physical fitness), manipulation/mobilisation, heat/ice, hydrotherapy and electrotherapy. An appreciation of psychological, cultural and social factors which may influence a patient's progress is integral to treatment.

Physiotherapists work in many speciality areas such as cardiorespiratory, musculoskeletal and neurology. They work as part of the inter-professional team in inpatient settings such as A and E, stroke units, ITU, surgical, orthopaedic, medical and oncology wards and in outpatient settings such as GP clinics, sports therapy clinics and hospital outpatient services. They also work in community settings, mental health services, palliative care centres, special schools, private practice, private industry and many more.

Modern Perspectives

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy recognises the need for research evidence to support the work of physiotherapy. The National Physiotherapy Research Network works to encourage, support and actively promote research in Physiotherapy and the physiotherapy profession now has a large number of physiotherapy professorial posts.

Physiotherapy has also branched out into other specialist areas with the development of extended scope practitioners and clinical specialists who can use injection therapy for pain and spasticity, run specialist clinics and conduct advanced diagnostic services.

Life Long Journey

Practicing as a physiotherapist requires undertaking a recognised three or four year university-based course leading to a BSc in physiotherapy. Such a course combines traditional study with clinical placements. Graduates gain a postgraduate qualification recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC). Registration with the HPC is essential to working as a physiotherapist in the NHS.

A newly qualified physiotherapist will probably begin work in the NHS and experience rotations of four/six months at a time in different specialities.

As clinical experience grows a physiotherapist may begin to specialise in areas such as community practice, sports medicine or working with the elderly and can progress to Consultant Physiotherapist. Careers are also available in health service management, research or lecturing.