



Lynne
McKinley
Prosthetist

Introduce yourself, where do you work? What is your job role?

Hi, my name is Lynne McKinley and I work as a prosthetist for a company called Opcare in Musgrave Park Hospital in Belfast. Not many people have heard of the job 'prosthetist.' What this means is that I manufacture artificial limbs (prostheses) for people who were born without or have lost part or all of one or more of their limbs. Prosthetists work in partnership with the NHS within a team of healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, dieticians and administration staff and prosthetic technicians to help patients reach their full rehabilitation potential. The prosthetist's role involves assessing the patient to identify their needs, creating a treatment plan, prescribing, and designing a prosthesis that meets their needs, fitting and modifying the prosthesis to ensure optimal comfort and function and helping the patient adapt to using their prosthesis. We apply our knowledge of anatomy and physiology, biomechanical principles, material science and 3D scanning and CAD/CAM technology to manufacture the best possible limb for the patient. There are opportunities to work with high-tech prosthetic componentry such as bionic knee joints, multi-articulating robotic hands and sports prostheses such as running blades.

How did you get into this line of work?

At school I was interested in doing physiotherapy or sports rehabilitation. I applied to university for both courses, but I was not successful in either. One of the universities I applied for was the University of Salford. They sent me letter asking if I would be interested in the Prosthetics and Orthotics degree. I had never heard of this degree before and had no idea what it would involve but did a bit of research and it sounded interesting. I flew over to Manchester and had a tour of the university and an interview with one of the lecturers. I was impressed with the course and liked Manchester so applied for it and thankfully was accepted.

Outline your career to date

In my last year at university, I started applying for jobs and was very lucky to be offered a job at the limb fitting centre in Belfast working for Opcare. I have been with the company in Belfast now for 14 years. I look after patients of all ages and levels of amputation, but I specialise in upper limb prosthetics. Recently I was given the role of Assistant Clinical Lead Prosthetist. This means I have more responsibility within the team and I am involved in service improvement initiatives.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

After my GCSEs, I stayed at school and completed my A Levels. I achieved a 2:1 BSc Prosthetics and Orthotics degree with honours. The degree course is a mixture of theory, practical workshop skills and manufacturing training and clinical placements. In the final year, you must complete a dissertation. The degree also qualifies you in orthotics, which is using splinting and braces to support skeletal structures to improve function. Once qualified you usually specialise in one or the other although some people are dual practicing in prosthetics and orthotics. When you start your first job position, you will complete a graduate mentoring programme. The programme provides you with support and guidance from a more experienced clinician to help you in the early stages of your career.

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

The job involves working with many different people so having the ability to work well with others and have good listening and communication skills are vital. Every patient is different and has individual needs, so the prosthetist needs to be adaptable, creative, and innovative. You will need to show sensitivity and empathy towards patients and their families and have the ability to motivate people.

What is the best advice you have ever recieved?

It is not really advice but when I started working in my job my manager said to me 'it takes 15 years to know this job.' When I heard that, it made me worry that if I was capable to do the job at all. I have since realised that he was right, and it has encouraged me to continuously work hard to improve my knowledge and skills. There is so much variety in this job and each day brings new challenges. It would be impossible to know everything without having the years of experience behind you. I have only been doing this for 14 years so I still have another year to go before I know my job!

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have a 5-year-old son, so we spend lots of time at the beach and adventuring in rock pools. I like to be active and regular attend circuit classes and play netball. When I get the chance, I enjoy socialising with friends and going out for a nice meal.

What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

You have plenty of time; do not feel pressurised to make big decisions about your future. Find your passion and work hard towards it. Be open to new opportunities and gain as much experience in different areas of work as you can. You do not have to go to university straight after school or even at all. There are many options for further education or working your way up through a company. As long as you enjoy what you are doing, working hard at it and becoming good at it will come easily.