



Helen Beattie

Community
Paediatric
Physiotherapist

What is the best advice you have ever received?

“As you wander through life, whatever be your goal, keep your eye upon the donut and not upon the hole!”

What does your job entail?

I am part of a multidisciplinary team providing physiotherapy input for children and young people presenting with a wide range of developmental, neurological, and orthopaedic conditions. Each day is different. Within one clinic I might treat a baby born extremely prematurely, a toddler with a diagnosis of Down's Syndrome who is learning to walk, a young child with Autism presenting with sore legs, a child with a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy who attends a mainstream school, or a teenager presenting with balance problems following a brain injury.

Some children may only need a few appointments until they are better, and others may need physiotherapy input for many years. Most appointments are at the Wellbeing and Treatment Centre where I am based, but I also carry out home visits, school visits, and treatment sessions in the hydrotherapy pool. My job involves, not just working with the children, but providing advice and support to their carers, and writing reports for example for the Education Authority on what a child's needs might be in the school environment. I also help to promote a healthy lifestyle and show children with disabilities how they too can get involved in sport and remain active.

Physiotherapy for children has to be fun, so lots of imagination and play is needed to make any exercises fun for the younger children. I love meeting and working with children and families from so many different backgrounds and trying to adapt to provide the right input for them in their context to help each child reach their full potential.

How did you get into this line of work?

At school I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I got a summer job working in a care home when I was 16 years old and as part of that job, I attended manual handling training taken by a physiotherapist. The physiotherapist demonstrated on a model of the human spine how its position changed with different movements to help us understand the reasoning behind the best ways to position our bodies when helping the residents to move. This sparked my interest in how our bodies move, and in a career in physiotherapy.

Outline your career to date

My first physiotherapy jobs were in the Ulster Hospital, initially as a Band 5 Rotational Physiotherapist and after a few years as a Band 6 Rotational Physiotherapist. Rotational posts are a fantastic opportunity to gain valuable skills in various different specialities as every six months I rotated to a different speciality in hospital or community sites. I had the opportunity to work in Intensive Care, Adult Musculoskeletal Outpatients, Regional Hand Injuries Unit, Stroke Unit, Fracture Clinic, Community Rehab Team, Paediatrics, and the Medical, Surgical, and Elderly Care wards. I helped deliver antenatal classes to pregnant ladies and participated in the on-call service to provide emergency chest physiotherapy to acutely unwell adults and children in the hospital overnight and at weekends.

These rotations allowed me to see which areas of physiotherapy suited me best, and I began to realise that my dream job would be a Community Children's Physiotherapist. For the past eight years I have done just that, working initially in Scrabo Children's Centre in Ards and Clifton Special School in Bangor, and more recently within Community Paediatrics within the Belfast Trust.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I studied Physiotherapy at The University of Nottingham. In our final year we were able to choose which additional modules we wanted to study, and I was fortunate to do a fantastic module in Physiotherapy in Mental Health, as well as Paediatric Physiotherapy. Since graduating I have done various postgraduate courses to further my skills including qualifying in the use of acupuncture and completing a more specialised paediatric course in the assessment and treatment of children and young people with Cerebral Palsy.

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

Physiotherapists need to be interested in working with people, have a caring nature, and be good communicators. It's important to be able to work well within a team, and be able to motivate, encourage and listen to people. An interest in human biology and promoting good health would be beneficial.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself?

When I applied to do physiotherapy, I got rejected from The University of Nottingham without any offer. One day at school I plucked up the courage to ring the University to get feedback on my application and reason for rejection, but I couldn't get through. A friend encouraged me to try phoning one last time, I got through, and as a result, I was offered an interview, and subsequently an offer and a place to study physiotherapy at the University of my choice. ***It taught me that sometimes it is worth trying just that one more time!***

Who has inspired you most in your life?

This is hard, as I've had the privilege of knowing many inspirational people. I am constantly inspired by the children and young people I work with and their positive outlook on life despite the obstacles they can face. I've also had the privilege of working alongside lots of inspirational colleagues. Clare, a Physiotherapy Assistant, stands out for me as someone who taught me a lot about working with children with severe learning difficulties. Outside work, my late friend Andrew inspired me with his unwavering positivity and confidence in God despite the difficulties with his health having been diagnosed with a brain tumour.