

Diane Wilson

Physiotherapist in Oncology and Lymphoedema



Oncology is a branch of medicine that deals with prevention, diagnosis and treatment of Cancer. Lymphoedema is a condition that results in swelling of upper and lower limb. It occurs due to a blockage of the lymphatic system.

What does your job entail?

My role as a Band 7 Physiotherapist in Oncology and Lymphoedema involves optimising people's function and wellbeing to enable them to live as independently and fully as possible, in spite of their condition, with choice and autonomy. Lymphoedema management includes education, manual lymph drainage (a form of massage), compression bandaging, measuring for compression garments and using a variety of electrotherapy modalities.

Oncology physiotherapy is both preventative and restorative, dealing with side effects of the condition and its treatment (radiotherapy and chemotherapy). I assess and treat a wide range of complex and varied patient presentations which makes every day different and challenging. Oncology physiotherapy involves many different areas of physiotherapy including musculoskeletal, respiratory, neurology and orthopaedics which makes it a very interesting field to be a part of.

How did you get into this line of work?

I was able to have rotations in both the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre and Northern Ireland Hospice as both a junior and senior physiotherapist and fell in love with the area. I always enjoyed all areas of physiotherapy and felt the specialty of oncology encompassed all the areas which suited me. Being able to help to make a difference in people's lives when they are going through a difficult journey is a job I feel very privileged to work in.

Outline your career to date?

I worked as a Band 5 Physiotherapist in the Erne Hospital (SWAH) and then in the Belfast City Hospital for over three years. I then worked at Band 6 level in a respiratory and oncology rotation for two years. Both of these rotations included the cancer centre and hospice. I worked as a Band 7 for 10 years in the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre in Belfast.

Following a move back to Tyrone I worked in the Condition Management Programme and Musculoskeletal Outpatients until I was able to take up a Band 7 post in Oncology and Lymphoedema in the Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex.

Tell us about your qualifications and training?

Following my A-levels I went on to study physiotherapy at university. I graduated from Ulster University with a BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy in 2003. I have completed extensive postgraduate training since qualification and physiotherapy is a profession where you are constantly learning, improving and building your knowledge base. I have completed a MSc module in exercise prescription in cancer care. I have also completed many specialist courses over the years and have successfully completed a post graduate lymphoedema qualification.

I have also completed respiratory, wound care and pain management courses to further my own development. There is lots of learning to be done and it keeps the job exciting and challenging.

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

I feel you need a broad range of experience from all core areas of physiotherapy to be able to fulfil this role effectively. It is essential to be a good communicator and also be sensitive and caring. You need to be prepared to “go that extra mile” for every patient to make sure their journey with you is a positive one.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

If you stop caring about every single patient you should think about another job.

A little bit about me

I work three days a week in my current physiotherapy role which gives me a good work/life balance. I am married with three children (aged 4, 7 and 9). I am now living 15 minutes away from work, which is a dramatic improvement from two hours, which it used to be. I love my work and I love my family life, so I count myself very blessed.

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

Take your time in deciding what you want to work at in life. You will be in that job for a long time and need to enjoy it and feel that it is the right one for you. When you know that it is right for you, work hard to get there and enjoy every moment of it!