



Donal Ferris

First Contact
Physiotherapist in
Newry & South Down
GP Federation

Can you give us a brief outline of your work history?

I have worked within physiotherapy services for over 20 years. I am currently working as a First Contact Physiotherapy Practitioner in the Primary Care Multidisciplinary Team in two practices in Newry and District GP Federation. Prior to this, I worked within the Southern Trust in wards and clinic-based settings. I gained experience in elderly rehabilitation, acute respiratory, neurology, orthopaedics, paediatrics, musculoskeletal (MSK) out-patients, and fracture clinics, as well as some time as a clinical lead for MSK outpatients.

What made you decide this career path?

I was always interested in working in a healthcare environment, and at school, I had an interest in science and sport. My mother was a physiotherapist in the health service. I completed work experience when in sixth form, and this gave me further insight into the occupation. I was keen to work in a role involving sport and exercise, and the degree in physiotherapy offered me these avenues along with working in the hospital environment. Having played sport to a high level, I had some exposure to the job in the sports environment from the ages of 16-18 and really enjoyed the prospect of having such a career opportunity, which ultimately encouraged my decision to complete the undergraduate degree.

How did you train for this role/educational route?

I completed a 4-year BSc Honours Degree in physiotherapy at the University of Ulster. Further courses and postgraduate training in areas of MSK assessment and management, including prescribing and injection therapy, have been developed to allow enhanced service provision to patients in the primary care environment. The course provided a high-quality degree that can be transferred worldwide.

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

Personal qualities: motivated, empathy, compassion, caring nature, good listener Professional qualities: well-organized, confident in your decision-making, work well within a team. Good communication skills and ability to motivate/encourage others to maximize health gains and manage injury and chronic conditions.

What does a typical day involve?

A typical day will involve getting to work early to assess the day's workload. Patients will be either seen face to face or through telephone contact to assess and manage a wide variety of MSK issues. Patients will have investigations such as X-rays and blood tests arranged and reviewed to assist in managing their presentation. Records are kept in a timely, on-the-day fashion to meet legal requirements. Physiotherapy management is discussed and developed with the patients to co-plan a program to assist with the management of their condition/injury. Multi-disciplinary discussion is held on a daily basis with other practice staff, including the GP, social work, nursing pharmacist, and mental health workers to assist with early intervention in managing complex patient needs. Referrals are made to community and voluntary agencies to assist patients to manage and maximize self-care of chronic conditions. If necessary, referrals are made to Trust services as required for further intervention in orthopaedic, rheumatology, and pain services. Referrals are made to the core physiotherapy team for further input in patients that need more 1:1 physiotherapy input. Time will also be spent in the office completing patient records, attending staff training, meetings, and conferences in line with ongoing professional development requirements.

What do you like best about your job?

I enjoy working as part of a team with other FCP physiotherapists as well as with other professional colleagues. The work is demanding, challenging, and will vary on a day-to-day basis. I enjoy having a positive impact on someone's quality of life. You are always learning and updating your skills. As a healthcare professional, getting good feedback from patients and their families is very satisfying and rewarding. Knowing that you can make a difference in improving a person's lifestyle and healthcare experience and assist with managing painful conditions makes the job worthwhile.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of doing your job?

I would really recommend physiotherapy as a career as you have great opportunities to work in a multitude of settings across many healthcare services. It is a very dynamic, respected, and valued profession worldwide. There are many avenues of work in the career of a physiotherapist. FCP in primary care is a developing field that needs more physiotherapists to enter into.