



Elma McAvoy

Specialist Occupational
Therapist/
OT Practice Education
Co-Ordinator

Can you give us a brief work history?

Qualified in 1984 and worked initially in a rotational post, gaining experience in medical and surgical wards, paediatrics, burns, fractures, neurology, neurosurgery, and orthopaedics. I then obtained a senior post in neurology and neurosurgery, completed a year in research, then a head post in care of the elderly. I have also worked with hospital and community rehabilitation teams, and in the Falls Prevention Service.
I've recently been appointed on secondment to the new post of OT Practice Education Co-Ordinator.

What made you decide to be an OT?

I originally wanted to be a teacher but there were very few job opportunities for teachers at that time. I noticed that there were many jobs advertised for OTs so decided to find out more about it. I was lucky to be able to visit my local OT department and met with several enthusiastic staff, who shaped my decision of career choice.

How did you train for this role/educational route?

After A-levels I went to the Ulster Polytechnic and completed the three year Diploma of the College of Occupational Therapy, which was later amalgamated with the University of Ulster and the course changed to degree status.

What does a typical day involve?

Currently my role involves planning and co-ordinating placements throughout the SHSCT, for the current OT students at Ulster University. Students complete professional practice education placements in all three years of their course, so I liaise with the university, OT staff and the students, to plan, arrange and evaluate suitable placements. I may be involved in training of the students on placement and of the staff who are working as Practice Educators, answering queries, co-ordinating learning opportunities and developing new ways of working for staff and students in the ongoing pandemic.
I am also involved in developing and providing careers advice for potential OT students and assisting with support for newly qualified OT staff.

What do you like best about your job?

Variety, working with people and helping others. OT is a very rewarding job, where you can help people maintain their independence and get the most out of their life, sometimes by my making little adjustments or simple interventions. We focus on the person – what is important to them and what matters most to them – to help them overcome whatever difficulty they are facing.
In my current post I enjoy contributing to the quality education of current and future students, staff, colleagues, and OTs – I may need one myself in the future!

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

Be a people person. You need to like people, have patience and a sense of humour. It can be a very demanding job, especially in the current climate of staff shortages and pressure on the NHS but is very rewarding to help patients/clients/service users reach their potential.