



Suzie Johnston

**Orthopaedic ICATS
Physiotherapist**

What does your job entail?

I work as an Advanced Practice Physiotherapist in an Orthopaedic ICATS team. This is an interface service that sits between primary and secondary care and is made up of a multidisciplinary team of specialist Physiotherapists, GPs, and Podiatrists. Working as part of this team, my role involves the triage, clinical assessment, and onward management pathway of the Orthopaedic referrals coming into the Southern Trust. This may include organising appropriate investigations, initiating specific treatments such as injections or physiotherapy, or facilitating timely referral to the most appropriate speciality.

How did you get into this line of work?

Prior to moving to Northern Ireland, I worked as a Spinal Extended Scope Physiotherapist in a large secondary care hospital in the South of England. Before that, I had worked as a static musculoskeletal physiotherapist in a community-based hospital. This previous broad experience provided a useful platform to support my role in Orthopaedic ICATS.

Outline your career to date

I qualified as a Physiotherapist in 1995 and have had a varied career working across the UK and in Australia. I completed my core rotations as a Junior Physiotherapist in Glasgow before spending a year working and travelling in Australia. On my return to Scotland, I worked as a manual handling advisor with a large Healthcare Trust in Edinburgh, where I also began my move towards Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy by working in a private Sports Clinic and with various local rugby teams. I moved to England in 1999, where I undertook my first static Musculoskeletal position, initially as a Senior 2 and then as Senior One (now known as Band 6/7). During this time, I was fortunate to be supported in undertaking additional training, not only in clinical practice but also in leadership skills. I subsequently had the opportunity to be seconded into a managerial role and the Clinical Facilitator role for the East Berkshire Back Pain Collaborative, an 18-month initiative supported by the Department of Health. It was this role that ignited my interest in spinal care and led to my advancement into a spinal Extended Scope Physiotherapy role in secondary care. After moving to Northern Ireland, I worked in a private clinic for a year before obtaining my current role as an Advanced Practice Physiotherapist in Orthopaedic ICATS.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I completed my BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy degree in Glasgow, and over the years, I have attended a wide variety of training courses spanning clinical, managerial, teaching, and research areas. I have also completed additional training in specific aspects of advanced practice, including imaging, blood interpretation, and injection training. I have a keen interest in training and development, and I have completed my PGCE for Health Professionals. I am an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Currently, I am completing my MSc in Advancing Physiotherapy Practice, and I have recently finished the ILM Level 2 Mentoring Skills course offered by the British School of Coaching.

What is the best advice you've ever received?

“Stay curious.” Physiotherapy is a profession that is constantly evolving, and it is important to always keep learning and reflecting on your practice. Despite being qualified for 28 years, I still feel like there is so much more to learn!

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have two very sporty teenagers, so a lot of my time involves standing on various sidelines or performing support team duties (washing kit and transportation). I also enjoy keeping fit by running and going to the gym. I play golf and ski, although I admit I'm not particularly skilled in either. I enjoy long walks with my Labradoodle, Digby, and I am a member of a book club, which started during lockdown and has continued ever since.

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

Have courage and don't be afraid to fail – just make sure you fail better next time around.