

Ten Questions about being an Advanced Practice Physiotherapist

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1. Please describe briefly your job role and responsibilities.

My ACP role is within a comprehensive stroke center at Salford royal. I am one of six ACPs who are from a range of clinical backgrounds (physiotherapist, nurse, occupational therapist and paramedic). I work across the service from the emergency department to rehab, working within the medical team. I have upskilled to be able to carry out clinical tasks and I'm a non-medical prescriber.

2. Please describe briefly your career pathway so far.

After my core physiotherapy rotations I've worked primarily in neurology in acute, inpatient rehabilitation, inpatient brain injury rehabilitation and community settings. I've worked within a stroke setting since 2008 in clinical and leadership posts. In 2017 I felt I needed a new challenge and applied for a trainee ACP post with a fully funded HEE masters. My varied and extensive background has helped me develop a very holistic view in patient care and also helped me to work within a medical structure

3. Have you completed any postgraduate education courses relevant to your role?

MSc in Advanced Clinical Practice

PG Cert. Advanced Practice (Older Persons Fellowship)

4. What have been the challenges in achieving advanced practice?

I think I was one of the first or possibly the first ACP working within stroke from a physiotherapy background. This produced some challenges in explaining my role to other clinicians and also in working out what my role was. There was no competencies for my role locally or nationally, we have now created a role profile on the stroke specific education framework, the neurology ACP competencies are underway and the new acute stroke ACP competencies will hopefully be started this year.

Working within a medical model as part of the medical workforce was challenging as the team functions differently to AHP teams. I needed to develop awareness of this and also understand how the medical workforce functions. You have to be resilient and be able to adjust to the new role, I moved from being in a leadership role to being at the bottom of the workforce, based on my clinical experience. It was important to give myself time to develop new knowledge and skills and use all the transferrable skills that came with me from my previous clinical roles. I'm very clear that I am not a doctor, I am something else, a holistic clinician that hopefully bridges across the MDT with my knowledge and experience.

There are still barriers to cross, as trusts and clinicians are unfamiliar with the role and particularly with having a AHP within the role. This is changing and with the addition of the ACP role within the stroke long term plan this will become an increasingly accessible career route for physiotherapists.

The next barrier for me is clarity within the career pathway but hopefully this will come as the new ACP roles are developed.

5. What advice would you give to a new graduate keen to develop as an advanced practice Physiotherapist?

I would advise not to rush towards an advanced practice role, all the skills and knowledge that I developed as a physiotherapist have been invaluable in my ACP role. Physiotherapy has the great benefit of being so varied, experience as much as possible before you specialise.

I would advise to be open to new challenges and take on roles and responsibilities that are not just about clinical tasks. There are four pillars of advanced practice – clinical, leadership, research and education. To meet all the four pillars you need more than just clinical skills. You also never know where saying yes to a new opportunity may take you.

6. What personal qualities/characteristics are important to have for your role as a Advanced practice or consultant Physiotherapist?

- You have to have good leadership skills – you may not be the one leading from the front but you need to be the one facilitating it.
- Being prepared to take on new challenges but also never be afraid to ask for help.
- Be positive and approachable.
- Don't be afraid of not knowing the answer but be prepared to find it out.
- Respect everyone that you meet and interact with – they will all have some kind of knowledge that you don't.
- Focus on the goal of patient care and making it the best it possibly can be within the constraints there is.
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7. How to measure your effectiveness as an Advanced practice physio?

I measure my success by reviewing if I made a positive difference to patient care as this is ultimately my role.

My second measure is to look at how the team around me functions, if we are working well then hopefully I am part of that success. If we are not working well then I look to identify what is not working and influence change to improve it, not always an easy task in a large multi-disciplinary team system.

8. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I am relatively new into my ACP role (just over 18 months) so I want to develop further clinical knowledge but I would also like to influence the service to improve patient care. Perhaps in five years

time I might be wondering about the next step up to a non-medical consultant post and hopefully we will have a framework in place by then.

9. What type of CPD activities do you do at this level?

I do range of CPD activities from very practical training for procedures to reading about conditions and increasing my medical knowledge. I've joined the consultants in their journal club, which is a very different experience to a physio journal club. I then make sure I have a range of leadership and clinical activities by being involved in the north west ACPIN committee and being a member of the national board of ACPIN as well as being the chair for the greater Manchester rehab group. I've tended to think more strategically as well as keeping my clinical competencies.

10. What would be your 3 top tips to an experienced Physiotherapist keen to develop as an Advanced practice or consultant physiotherapist.

1. Don't wait for someone else to write you the job description – you have to influence people in position of power to create the opportunities.
2. Be clear about what role you want – advanced roles are changing all the time, know what aspect you are interested in.
3. Be willing to say yes to opportunities for secondments and be the person that steps up to take on new projects and don't be afraid to ask. You never know where saying yes may take you.