

**AUT**

A FUTURE IN  
**PHYSIOTHERAPY**



## WHAT IS PHYSIOTHERAPY?

The common perception of physiotherapists massaging sports stars' aching muscles on the playing field is a flawed one, because it only tells a fraction of the story. Physiotherapy is a very broad medical field, with physios working in hospitals, private clinics, retirement villages and community health centres, as well as on sports fields. Their work covers all ages from premature babies to the elderly.

Physiotherapists help patients with physical difficulties caused by illness, injury, disability or ageing. They also facilitate independence and the recovery of body function when people have a disability or problem caused by physical, neurological (related to the brain and nervous system) or other disorders. They need to have a deep and clear understanding of the neuromuscular, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

In a broader sense, physios promote public health and injury prevention through education and advice. Their work can involve devising and reviewing treatment programmes comprising manual therapy, movement and therapeutic exercise. They also need to be skilled in the use of technological equipment, like spirometers for measuring lung function.

Are you interested in how the body works? Can you communicate with a broad range of people? Do you want to use both your compassion and practical ability to help people in need? Then a career in physiotherapy could be great for you.





## OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

**Ageing population** – The number of people over 65 has doubled since 1980, and is likely to double again by 2036. According to the Physiotherapy Board strategic plan, there is a growing need for physios that can help the aged because people are working and living longer than ever before.

**Need for flexibility** – The healthcare environment will continue to change with an emphasis on delivery closer to where people live and an increase in community-based service. Physiotherapy is already ideally placed as a primary care provider of services, with two thirds of physiotherapists working in private practices located within the community.

Source: Physiotherapy Board strategic plan

**Increase in physio numbers** – The number of physiotherapists has gradually, but continually, increased each year since 2006. According to workforce projections, as the population grows towards 2035, the number of physiotherapists will need to continue rising to maintain the current physiotherapist to population ratio.

Source: Careers NZ

**Integrated care/team approach** – An increasing number of patients are presenting with complicated physical conditions that have more than one contributing factor. Consequently, physiotherapists have adopted a multidisciplinary approach by consulting other health professionals. This has resulted in collaborative healthcare practices that employ a broader range of specialists.

## WORK SETTINGS

There are three main work settings for physiotherapists:

- district health boards in acute care hospitals and rehabilitation centres
- community based – visiting patients in their homes
- private clinics – two thirds of physios are in private practice where they may also work with sports teams, schools, gyms or community centres.

Physiotherapists may specialise in the following areas:

- musculoskeletal physiotherapy
- sports physiotherapy
- acupuncture
- neurorehabilitation (related to the brain and nervous system)
- people with breathing difficulties
- children with disabilities
- women's health

Hospital departments can include:

- older adults
- intensive care
- mental health
- occupational health
- orthopaedics
- adult medical and surgical
- paediatrics

They usually work regular business hours, but may also work weekends and be on call.

## CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

### Private physiotherapist

Works individually or in partnership with other physios in premises they own or rent. They are responsible for their own workflow in terms of sourcing patients, and need to act as business owners as well as health professionals.

Most practices focus on the management of musculoskeletal disorders, for example sports or work-related injuries. Practitioners may also work with local or national sports teams, or with gyms to provide specialised exercise prescription for people with specific needs.

Some practices focus on a specialisation, eg management of respiratory problems, women's health, hand injuries or neurological disorders.

### Public Health Service physiotherapist

Employed by a District Health Board in either an acute care hospital, a rehabilitation hospital or in a community-based context. They work as part of a health professional team that includes doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals (occupational therapists and/or social



workers), who aim to restore people back to health and to their community. Their patients include acute orthopaedic, surgical, medical, neurology, oncology, women's health paediatric, rehabilitation, critical care and intensive care settings. Depending on the size of the hospital, a physiotherapist might work across several areas, or specialise in one area, for example paediatrics, spinal cord injuries, or burns and plastics.

### Community-based rehabilitation physiotherapist

Employed by charitable institutions or private providers who offer rehabilitation services for people who have either congenital or acquired conditions including traumatic brain and multi-trauma injuries, stroke, cancer, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis.

## SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Analysis of movement disorders following a stroke or head injury, arthritis etc
- Diagnosis of musculoskeletal disorders, eg ligament sprains, muscle or tendon tears, or arthritis
- Knowledge of physiotherapy techniques including massage, mobilisation and manipulation; exercise and movement retraining
- Management of breathing disorders like asthma or bronchiectasis
- Detailed understanding of the biomedical sciences, including anatomy, physiology and pathology
- Expertise in the field of movement analysis, injuries, disabilities and the aging process
- Interpersonal skills in order to establish rapport with patients and their families
- Collaborative ability with other healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, podiatrists, occupational therapists, speech language therapists and social workers
- Ability to work under pressure and manage time effectively

## PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Compassionate and empathetic
- Able to gain people's trust
- A good listener
- Understanding of other cultures
- Well organised and good time manager

## PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

All practising physiotherapists must be registered with the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand and hold a current Annual Practising Certificate.

## SALARY GUIDE

On the whole, salaries are more stable in the public sector. Private physios at the top end of the salary range generally earn more than public physios, but the same is also true at the bottom end of the scale, ie more lower paid physios are likely to be in the private sector. The average over both sectors is the same – \$70,000.

	Salary
Physiotherapists (1-6 years' experience)	\$46,000-\$69,000 pa approx
Senior physiotherapists (6 years plus):	\$69,000-\$95,000 pa approx

Source: Physiotherapy New Zealand

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (January 2016) and should only be used as a guideline.

## THE AUT APPROACH

AUT and the University of Otago are the only two tertiary institutions in NZ that offer physiotherapy. Physiotherapy students at both schools must complete 1,000 hours of supervised clinical experience before graduating.

Students undertake clinical practice at hospitals and private practices anywhere in the North Island between Gisborne and Northland.

AUT also has its own Integrated Health Centre on site that provides services to the public including physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, counselling psychology, and oral health. This gives AUT students the opportunity to work and learn together, using an integrated team approach.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

AUT offers the Master of Health Science, Doctor of Health Science and PhD programmes in physiotherapy.

AUT also provides postgraduate study in the following specialist areas of physiotherapy:

- Acupuncture (Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Health Practice)
- Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy (Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Health Practice)
- Rehabilitation (Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Health Practice)

Staff research in physiotherapy includes the following areas:

- Neurological rehabilitation
- Musculoskeletal injuries and exercise
- Ergonomics

## NICOLA JEPSEN

Physiotherapist, Middlemore Hospital, Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB)

Part-time lecturer in physiotherapy, AUT

"My family is quite healthcare-oriented, so I was always interested in health as a career option. I was quite sporty when I was younger, and I was aware of physio as a pathway. However, it has turned out I specialise in cardio-respiratory physiotherapy, which is not sporty in the least!

When I finished my degree at AUT, I got a job as a rotational physiotherapist at Middlemore Hospital, which meant that I did a lot of rotations in different areas of the hospital. I really liked cardio-respiratory because it was fast-paced and I enjoyed working within a big multidisciplinary team. It was more medical, academic and quite challenging, which I found really stimulating.

The main part of my job is working with patients on the wards, assessing them for respiratory problems and mobility issues. I offer treatment to optimise their function and rehabilitation, so that they can resume their normal lives. As well as this, I'm working on a community respiratory disease research project that involves the use of technology to assist patients to manage their health independently, so it's pretty exciting.

I love the pace of it, the fact that I'm working with a big, diverse team with broad expertise and the amount of variation and challenge. It can be tricky to manage the workload and prioritising demands, not to mention the complex cases that we get, but it's so interesting to be able to consult with the team and come up with solutions.

In the future I'd like to pursue more research work and to get more into teaching. I'm really interested in the academic aspect of physiotherapy, and I'd love to help others get into it."

### EMPLOYER COMMENT

"Physiotherapists need to be able to think on their feet, have sound clinical reasoning skills, negotiate a busy clinical environment and work as part of a large interdisciplinary team.

Nicola was well equipped through her training at AUT to work within a wide range of clinical areas and teams. She came to the job with an inquiring mind and that allowed her to seek new opportunities in her work. She is now moving her skills into the education and research environment, which is really valuable for us too."

**Simon Kerr**

Associate Director Allied Health; Professional Leader, Physiotherapy  
Counties Manukau Health District Health Board





## USEFUL WEBSITES

### Physiotherapy New Zealand

[www.physio.org.nz](http://www.physio.org.nz)

### Physiotherapy Board of NZ

[www.physioboard.org.nz](http://www.physioboard.org.nz)


## FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on physiotherapy and the Bachelor of Health Science, please visit: [www.aut.ac.nz/physio](http://www.aut.ac.nz/physio)

### FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: [www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire)


[futurestudents@aut.ac.nz](mailto:futurestudents@aut.ac.nz)

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### CURRENT AUT STUDENTS

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

[www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire) | [studenthub@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studenthub@aut.ac.nz)

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### EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For other Future Career Sheets visit:


[www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets](http://www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets)


For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through <https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>


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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, August 2019.

