A FUTURE IN 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.

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WHAT IS PHYSIOTHERAPY?

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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 andastics.

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.

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<tr>
<th>Salary</th>
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<td>Physiotherapists (1-6 years’ experience)</td>
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<td>Senior physiotherapists (6 years plus)</td>
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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
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Clinical placements
Students undertake clinical practice at hospitals
and private practices anywhere in the North Island
graduating.

AUT and the University of Otago are the only two

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.physiotherapy.org.nz

Physiotherapy Board of NZ
www.physioboard.org.nz

Competencies Chart for Physiotherapists in NZ

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

You can also contact the AUT Student Hub team for help and advice:

0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)
email: studentcentre@aut.ac.nz

CITY CAMPUS
55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

NORTH CAMPUS
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

SOUTH CAMPUS
640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

AUT MILLENNIUM
17 Antares Place, Mairangi Bay, Auckland

Connect with us now:

www.aut.ac.nz/social

The information contained in this career sheet was correct at time of print, Jan 2016

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