

“You work at a hospice? That must be so difficult....”

This is a phrase so many physiotherapists working in palliative care hear. We would like to tell you why a career in this field is so rewarding, both professionally and personally.

What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is the active, holistic care of patients with advanced progressive illness, through impeccable assessment and treatment of physical, psychosocial and spiritual concerns. Palliative care may be delivered in hospices, acute hospitals or within the community. It is not just for those with cancer, but those with any terminal condition, for example heart failure, progressive neurological diseases and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

A typical day for a Physiotherapist in Palliative Care

Firstly, there is no typical day! Due to the huge variety in patients and their families that are looked after in palliative care, no two days are the same. A day may include working in a hospice inpatient unit, in patients own homes, in acute hospitals or with outpatients attending day therapies. A physiotherapist may be rehabilitating a patient post spinal cord compression, then seeing someone trying to regain fitness after chemotherapy, offering respiratory secretion advice to someone at the end of life and then running a breathlessness management group. Close working with a multidisciplinary team is vital in palliative care to provide a truly holistic approach to supporting patients and families.

Professional Opportunities in Palliative Care

Rehabilitation in palliative care is a rapidly expanding field of research, identifying the positive benefits of physiotherapy for patients with advanced disease. Now is a really exciting time to be joining the speciality, with the role of physiotherapists being increasingly recognised as vital to delivery of care. As a relatively small speciality there can be many more professional development opportunities for those in the field, such as being part of professional networks or advisory groups.

Personal Benefits of Working in Palliative Care

Being able to provide excellent patient care at such a crucial point in someone's life is hugely satisfying. In assisting people through the dying process, physiotherapists can show them how to continue living by delivering enabling and empowering support. Many physiotherapists say that working with people with progressive diseases, whilst emotionally demanding at times, is deeply rewarding. Despite what you may expect, hospices have wonderful atmospheres, with laughter often filling the corridors and a team spirit felt by staff, patients and their families alike.

What Skills are needed in a Physiotherapist in Palliative Care?

- Good communication skills, intuition and compassion to support people with challenging decisions.
- Ability to use problem solving skills and think outside the box.
- Being dynamic and flexible to adapt to different working environments and conditions.
- Capacity to be a generalist and a specialist - high levels of knowledge and skill, but able to apply these to a wide range of conditions and comorbidities.

The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Oncology and Palliative Care is a professional network of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, which aims to support members working within these specialities, promote the role of physiotherapy and influence policy at local and national levels.

If you would like to know more about Physiotherapy in Oncology and Palliative Care, please visit our website <http://acpopc.csp.org.uk/>

References

- 1) NCPC (2015) <http://www.ncpc.org.uk/palliative-care-explained> [accessed 21st May 2017]
- 2) WHO (2017) <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/> [accessed 21st May 2017]