

James Bermingham

James is based at United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust, read below James's case study.

My role in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is quite varied but the main part of my role is the rehabilitation of critically ill patients and patients who have had major abdominal surgery. However, given the nature of the ICU I work on there are many different skills I need to apply such as low level respiratory interventions, rehabilitation of neurologically impaired patients, early mobilisation of post-operative patients and making sure sedated patient's joints and muscles do not get stiff or tight while they are asleep. We also use a piece of equipment called the 'Motomed' which is essentially a mechanical exercise bike that can be used by patients in the bed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic I helped run a virtual post-ICU class, one of only 10 in the UK, as we were unable to bring our patients to face-to-face sessions as we normally would. This gave me an interesting perspective on how patients manage after a prolonged ICU admission and gave me the opportunity to help them overcome the hurdles that they now had to traverse at home.

I first started my career as a support worker as a rotational Physiotherapy assistant rotating through medical, surgical, orthopaedics, and neurological areas. I did this for 5 years before I became a Senior Assistant in my current post. I was helped through my development with a competency framework through the first 6 months of my new role teaching me about the ICU environment and about how to conduct initial assessments of patients. The environment is the biggest challenge initially as you are faced with patients who have a lot more attachments than normal such as multiple IV drips, post-surgical drains, filters for dialysis and ventilators etc.

Having therapy assistants in intensive care settings is a relatively new idea which has been pushed forward by studies showing the importance of early interventions for critically ill patients. This is great news for support workers as intensive care offers new opportunities to develop new skills, learn about a new clinical environment and help those patients who are most in need.