

Sandra Roper – returning physiotherapist

I have found that physiotherapy is something you 'are' rather than something you do.

I qualified in 1992 and after spending some years working in orthopaedics I left to have a family thinking that it would be easy for me to return once my children started school. But things turned out a little different from what I expected and after spending a number of years running my own retail training business and then moving into operations management for a charity, I was left wondering whether I would ever get back into physiotherapy.

Feeling unsure about where my career was going now the kids were older, I went for a coffee with a friend who asked me "What drives you?" I knew the instant he asked.

I wanted to be involved in something where I could help people rebuild their confidence in themselves. I wanted to be part of something where I could impart specialist knowledge in a way that it came across as common sense to who I was speaking. I wanted to enable people who were either hurt, ill, or injured to hope for a future again.

I knew I was describing who I was as a physio!

I contacted the CSP and from there found out about the return-to-practice programme run by HEE. Having been out for over 15 years I was required to complete 60 days of updating, and to do that within one year, and I wanted to do this all as supervised practice.

First, I got in touch with a physio I had met at a CSP event and spent a week shadowing her at St Nicholas' Hospice to check that it all made some sense to me - and I loved it! So, I contacted my local hospital and had an MSK placement all set up, and was about to hand my notice in, when the covid-19 pandemic hit, and the placement fell through. It was a horrid time for a whole load of reasons, but I was really determined so I started looking at the formal and private study options that I could use for completing my updating hours and got stuck into online study around my full-time job. I was hooked!

After several months and quite a few emails and calls, plus presenting on HEE webinar about RtP, I secured a supervised placement on the wards at the West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St Edmunds. They were so accommodating despite being in the second wave of the pandemic. I spent a couple of weeks each across orthopaedics, respiratory, community and medical wards and gained a huge amount of experience in a concentrated amount of time. It was full-on going across the different specialities like that, but I can thoroughly recommend it if you feel you've been out so long that you just need all-round experience to get yourself back into the mindset.

When the West Suffolk Hospital advertised for a band 5 position just as I had received confirmation of being back on the HCPC register I applied without hesitation; and was offered the job! I am now thoroughly enjoying being back on rotations. I would say to anyone considering returning – ask yourself what drives you? Is that what you get from being an AHP? And if the answer is 'yes', then go for it with all you've got! Write those emails, pick up that phone, search out that podcast, that online seminar, that course, that book, and get back to doing what you love!

You are already qualified! You just need to get back on that register!