



P&O Day 2021

Maureen Fernandes, Advanced Orthotist, NHS Lothian

Having always enjoyed working with people, a career in P&O was an easy choice as it was clear that it would give me an opportunity to contribute towards improving the quality of many lives. Also having enjoyed physics and human biology in school and the fact that the course/job was as equally hands on as it was theoretical, made it all the more appealing to me.

Although it was Prosthetics that initially drew my attention, as I got through my undergraduate years, the Orthotic modules for ankle foot orthoses, knee ankle foot orthoses and spinal orthotics caught my interest, creating a passion for Orthotics. This was then confirmed when did my clinical placements, where I could imagine myself working as an Orthotist.

My job role at present mainly involves working as a Spinal Orthotist, specialising in the Orthotic treatment of spinal scoliosis. This includes prescribing corrective and postural custom-made spinal braces for children with a scoliosis in their spine (lateral curvature of the spine).

My case load can vary from working with children with small idiopathic curves to children and adults with a complex medical history and with large idiopathic and neuromuscular curves. My typical working week includes clinical days where patients are assessed and measured for a spinal brace via a casting procedure, followed by fitting of the spinal braces a few weeks later. I attend a weekly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) clinic alongside the Spinal Consultant where the patients attend for an in-brace x-ray to assess how effective the brace is. My week also consists of a non-clinical day for the rectification of spinal casts prior to manufacture in our in-house Orthotic workshop. An important part of my role includes working closely with other members of the MDT (spinal consultants, spinal liaison nurses, radiographers, technicians, administrative team) to optimise patient care. The part I love most about my job is the fact that it is so rewarding.

My typical caseload can include patients with an Idiopathic, neuromuscular, congenital or syndromic scoliosis. The age range can vary from 6 months to 18 years as well as some adults with a neuromuscular scoliosis who are seen long term by the service for postural braces. The aim of brace treatment for corrective braces is to prevent or delay surgical intervention until the end of growth. For postural braces, typically prescribed for neuromuscular scoliosis, the aim of treatment is to help improve the posture of the spine whilst sitting which helps improve the function of vital organs as well as upper limb function. The fact that Orthotics is such a wide field means every case is individual, exposing the team to a new challenge every day.

After securing an Honours degree in Prosthetics and Orthotics in 2012, I started my career as an Orthotist in NHS Lothian. As a new graduate, I mainly covered lower and upper-limb orthotics and spinal trauma. In 2015, I was given an exciting opportunity to expand my clinical knowledge and join the spinal orthotics team and to become a part of the Scottish National Spinal Deformity Service. Working as part of the spinal team in Edinburgh over the last 6 years has enabled me to establish a good rapport with patients as well as colleagues. I have had the opportunity to continue developing my knowledge and skills, and to also be involved in research work in spinal Orthotics. I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it and plan to continue my contribution in Spinal Orthotics.

I work for the Orthotics Department at NHS Lothian. We are mainly based at the SMART Centre at the Astley Ainslie Hospital but tend to cover clinics in hospitals all around the Lothians. Having specialised in Spinal Orthotics, I am also part of a sub-team of 5 spinal Orthotists. The spinal team covers clinics at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and the Royal Hospital for Children and Young people and treats patients from all over Scotland as it is a national service.