

Your First...experience of being an occupational therapist.

Rose speaks to Kay, an Advanced Clinical Practitioner about her first experience of being an occupational therapist.

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Rose [01:00:00]

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to another episode of your First of Everything. Today I am joined by Kay, who is an occupational therapist. Hello, Kay.

Kay [01:00:09]

Hi, Rose. Lovely to meet you.

Rose [01:00:11]

And you as well. So before we start, can you just explain to me and to the audience what an occupational therapist is?

Kay [01:00:19]

Certainly. So an advanced clinical practitioner or ACP, is an experienced registered health care practitioner who has a kind of a master's level award or equivalent. And within the role, you have a high level of autonomy and complex decision making. So we're able to kind of manage to find episodes of care independently from beginning to end. So an advanced clinical practitioner can be pretty much from any clinical background. And so the roles and tasks which they undertake vary depending on their core profession, indeed the service line that they're working in.

Rose [01:00:55]

Right. Okay. Thank you for that. So tell me then about your first experience of being an occupational therapist.

Kay [01:01:03]

Okay, so I qualified as an ACP, but in 2018, my first role was within a assessment. Team within the community in mental health. So within that role, I worked alongside a number of different team members from lots of different disciplines. I was the first advanced clinical practitioner within the service and as such there was potentially a lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding the role and where my kind of scope of competencies lie in things. So I guess a large part of my role was embedding that and promoting that to other colleagues around actually what I can offer as an ACP around kind of extended roles and things. So typically the advanced

clinical practitioner role is broken down into four different pillars. So the first one being clinical. So that's working clinically facing with patients. So my, my clinical speciality, if you like, is within mental health. And that's where I've worked from qualifying as an occupational therapist back in 2005. I've worked in mental health and so within the assessment team I would work alongside patients and provide diagnostic assessments, formulations, extended assessments. And in relation to occupational therapy, I guess there is absolutely you know, I'd use my core skills as an OT every single day. But I guess what the ACP qualification allows is that breadth of interventions and assessments that I'm able to bring. There's also the leadership pillar. So within that, within that first role, I would lead things like complex case panels, lead pathways, meetings to look at actually the throughput I'd lead on things like quality improvement initiatives across the service line. So not just within that part of the service in different areas as well. And again, that ties in nicely with the research pillar, obviously that dissemination of best practice and finally facilitation of learning. So what that would look like is identifying trained needs within the service, looking at actually the skills that we've got within the workforce, facilitating some of that training. But also promoting other colleagues and, you know, other colleagues to facilitate those training, those training sessions where appropriate, because again, a large part of that advanced practice role is about looking at the workforce and maximising the potential within it. It's not just around that ACP facilitating everything. It's about upskilling the workforce as a whole. Yeah, so that's a bit of a snapshot of my role. So, so far.

Rose [01:03:42]

So how then, how did that feel knowing that you were going to step into this role as an occupational therapist and being very, very new, that role itself, being very, very new in that kind of environment? How did that feel knowing that that's what you were going to step in and do? To me, I'd be a bit nervous personally.

Kay [01:04:00]

But yeah, understandably so, because, you know, there's that there's the uncertainty surrounding it, which is really good question. So I was really lucky in the service that I was working in our head of operations at the time. It was really supportive of advancing practice and within my So my training took place over two years and I had kind of experiential placements within the different parts of the adult mental health pathway. And so I developed my job plan over a space of time. So actually at the point of qualifying, I get a really good working knowledge and understanding of the different services, the patient journey, and so obviously the promotion of the role and kind of colleagues understanding what the role is. And you know, that's for me, that was really exciting because it is new. But that said, it was also really daunting as well. You know, we've come a long way in the past five years in relation to advancing practice in our advanced practice mental health network. Now there's lots of forums to get involved in. Unfortunately, at that time the word as much as there is now. So it was quite it's quite isolating to be at times, if I'm being completely honest. Yeah, Yeah.

Rose [01:05:12]

So from that point of view, then when was the moment that you actually went, okay, this is a little bit nerve wracking, you know, it's a little bit isolating, but actually this is what I want to do. When was that moment that you went? Yep, this is it.

Kay [01:05:27]

Wow. I'm not sure there's a definitive moment in time. There were certainly points where within my training, at least the way I question, I was thinking, this is too hard. This is, you know, I'd left a you know, I'd left a job as a ward manager, which again, is a non-traditional role and which I really loved and enjoyed to, to almost like put myself in a position which is completely out of my comfort zone, learning all these new skills which had like no experience in. And so there's lots of that. I'm not sure of a definitive moment surrounding kind of that this is what I want to do, if I'm completely honest, sort of a progressive thing. I got. It's like when you get out your comfort zone, you become more comfortable over time as you're kind of comfort zone gets bigger. And I think it was more of more of that.

Rose [01:06:16]

Well, I think that's really positive, though, that you've had that progressive point of view, but also you've recognised that actually now that I'm in it, I'm enjoying this. You know, I am where I'm at. This is this is what I want to do and continue going forward. And is there anything that you would have done different within your career? Is there anything that you can think of you might have done differently?

Kay [01:06:35]

Oh, wow. It's a really good question. So off the top of my head, what I would have liked to have done early on. So from even the start of my before I even start my old T training, I was a health care assistant in mental health, and my dream has always been to work in mental health. I think that's really great to have that sort of goal. But what it did unfortunately, was it kind of blinkered me to other learning experiences. So if I was to go through again, I would have. Experience more of that breadth of poverty because, you know, there's so many different avenues that you can go down. As No, but because my mind was set on mental health. Any other learning opportunities, I was almost closed off too. So I think potentially doing a rotation at the start of my career as opposed to going straight into mental health, you know, to maybe look at other areas and experience those I might have done. Yeah, but other than that, I've been so lucky. I've had some amazing jobs and worked alongside some amazing clinicians, so there isn't anything else other than that really.

Rose [01:07:37]

Is there any advice that you'd give to a student that's thinking, Well, let's go with a student occupational therapist that's thinking about following the ACP route?

Kay [01:07:47]

Wow. Yeah, I'd say absolutely. Go for it. Definitely. This is a fantastic route to go down in terms of being able to progress clinically and because obviously, you know, historically it would be if you wanted to maybe progress, you might go down that operational leadership route. Whereas actually as an ACP, you are able to still progress, but you're still clinically facing. So if your your kind of values aligned to working with patients and that's what you want to do, ACP is a really good route to be able to have that autonomy and that independence to be able to make those decisions, but also develop that breadth so you can work alongside people, you know, with diagnostic uncertainty. You know, that clinical complex presentation. It is still really challenging. Five years into being quantified every day is still very

challenging, you know, And so it's absolutely goal for it. And certainly there's there's so many networks and there's lots of information in relation to kind of ACP and things that you can get involved in. And so to reduce some of that isolation because still, you know, as OTS and indeed and HP, we we are still, I'd say underrepresented within advancing practice and more and more as time goes on, organisations are kind of recognising the value that HP and OTS bring to advanced practice. And so yeah, I feel like things are only just going to get better, to be honest. So absolutely go for it. That would be my advice.

Rose [01:09:20]

That's good. That's brilliant. It's really good advice. Are there any sort of you just mentioned then about some challenges that you might have faced? Are there is there any advice that you'd give to any any students that might face some of these challenges as to what they can do?

Kay [01:09:33]

And certainly using reflection and supervision, those are the key things. Taking a step back. Yeah, speaking to your supervisor, being open and honest about how you're feeling, you know, it's the point of learning is, is to make those mistakes within a safe environment. And so actually use use that time and use that space to be able to work through things that are challenging and get your learning planning, you know, get that learning plan in place so that you can you can kind of work through them, I'd say, and actually give yourself a break as well. You know, there are going to be mistakes that you make and unfortunate that that is all part of a process of learning and and then reflecting on that and then hopefully moving forward and maybe not making that mistake again. And it does happen. I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be perfect. But actually as a student you are learning and that's okay.

Rose [01:10:29]

Exactly. And I think as well, we could even argue we're lifelong learners.

Kay [01:10:32]

Absolutely.

Rose [01:10:33]

So we're going to continue to make mistakes along the way. And actually, that's just a part of being a human.

Kay [01:10:38]

I think you're absolutely right Yeah.

Rose [01:10:42]

Make the mistakes because that's how you learn from them, you know, go along with it. is there, is there any kind of what are your aspirations for the future? Have you got anything in mind?

Kay [01:10:54]

And I'd like to work towards consultant level practice in the future. And so that is an aspiration, absolutely to, to, to be a consultant occupational therapist within, within

mental health and certainly to undertake my PhD. Yeah. And to continue to, to work with with patients would be the number one adult. I don't at this point in I don't want to step back from that. So to be in a role where I feel like I'm making a difference and I'm valued, but also clinically facing, that would be incredible if I got to continue to do that. That would be great. So those things, I think, yeah.

Rose [01:11:32]

Well, I wish you all the best in the future with those aspirations. I'm sure you're going to do fantastic. Thank you for joining us today and sharing your experience with us.

Kay [01:11:42]

My pleasure. Thanks for inviting me. Thank you. Thank you.

Rose [01:11:47]

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