

Lee [01:00:02]

Hello and welcome to your first of everything. My name is Lee and I am very fortunate today to have Katie with me. She is a apprentice occupational therapist and is going to be sharing some experience about what that role is like and a bit around what it's like returning to education as well. Hi Katie, how are you?

Katie [01:00:24]

Hi. Not too bad. Thank you.

Lee [01:00:26]

Oh, well, thank you so much for coming to speak to us today. We really appreciate it. Do you want to start maybe by just giving a bit about your background and, how you arrived in your current sort of role?

Katie [01:00:39]

So back in 2014, I graduated with a degree in sports and exercise therapies and rehabilitation. But from graduating in that degree, I quickly realised that actually I wanted to move my work into the hospitals. So I originally gained a post as a generic therapist agent linking in with physio and occupational therapy, but still linking in with my background of rehab. I joined a very busy acute medical therapy team, within a teaching hospital, and then was promoted to an OT assistant practitioner role. Within my assistant practitioner role I am. I'm part of a very busy acute medical ward alongside a very large MDT. Doctors, nurses, physiotherapists. I was actually on maternity leave at the time that I was inquiring about the apprenticeship, and I didn't expect it to come in so soon. So I always knew, that from working within the acute medical therapy team as an assistant practitioner, that I wanted to kind of top up to qualify to be an occupational therapist. I have got two young children. So coming out of my work and then returning back to university financially had a big implication. So the apprenticeship route was something that I always wanted to explore. So whilst off on maternity leave, I was contacted by, you know, therapy managers to say, you know, they're bringing the apprenticeship in now across the trust. And they secured a placement within a university. So I actually returned to work from maternity leave quite early because in all honesty, I wasn't too sure whether the programme would be run again in the future. So I just saw my chance and kind of took it. So I returned from maternity leave and began to start the journey on the OT apprenticeship. The OT apprenticeship, how it's taught is I continue to work in the acute medical therapy team, and there is blocks of teaching weeks at the university. So my current course at the moment works out I think averages out every three months. There's one block

of teaching and then you've also got your placements involved in that as well. So I am aware that most trusts and even different teams within the trust that I am currently in. Probably run the apprenticeship a little bit different. And that may just depend on certain teams, you know, staffing levels. So I would go to a teacher week, and then you will also obviously attend your placements as well. And they can vary placements or sometimes ten weeks placements or sometimes eight weeks. And the university saw some placements for you. And the idea of the placements is, is basically you will go into a service and a team that you haven't really got experience in. So for example, I have I'm up to nine years now working in acute medical therapy teams and I also. I've worked within my Trust Rapid Response team, so covering A and A within that nine years as well. So the placements that I've been sent out on our community placements, I'd be in on a. Spinal injuries placement. So it's like specialist rehab which is completely different to the background I have come from in acute medicine. The pace is completely different. And obviously the rehab side of it is completely different as well. And then I have also done a role in marriage and placement. Within my current trust. But it was over in the transfer of Care Hub. And the aim of the role of merge and placement was that you basically had to develop either a resource or an intervention. Within a team where there wasn't an occupational therapist, but would benefit from occupational therapy within that team. So it really got you thinking outside the box and actually setting you up for once you graduate with that qualification. How you can implement occupational therapy no matter where you go. I am currently going into my third year after a. So it is due to finish academically in December, but there will be like an endpoint assessment in January 2025. So fingers crossed. And all being well I pass that and then I would qualify as an occupational therapist.

Lee [01:05:37]

That's amazing. Congratulations. It sounds like you've come into this with so much experience, and obviously you've been working within, those clinical areas for a long time. What did it feel like sort of returning to that learner role, if you like, that sort of supernumerary status when you were probably used to. Leading your own workloads, I would imagine.

Katie [01:06:03]

Yeah. So like I say, currently within my trust, and as part of my role as an assistant practitioner, I am on a ward with a wider disciplinary team, but I am responsible for picking up their patients, completing their initial assessments and seeing that patient through until discharge and completing the interventions in between that discharge planning. And you've referred onto, you know, additional community services, completing access visits, moving hands on plans if patients are required and

additional equipment at home and things like that. A nine years in acute medicine. I actually found it personally really difficult to then be taken out on placement and be a student, because I was so used to holding such a big caseload and working in such a busy and demanding environment, that was acute medicine in quite a big teaching hospital. It did take me quite a long time to settle down into the role of a student in all honesty, and not hold a caseload. And through speaking with my supervisors back at my trust and supervisors on placement as well, and just discussing that, it was almost like it was alien to me to go into work and be almost delegated a caseload again. But what I had to do is kind of take a step back and realise that this was my opportunity to be out on placement as a student and take the opportunity to learn, because, like I say, everybody's role on the apprenticeship is different and it depends if they're coming from hospitals, if they're coming from councils. And within my cohort, there's such a large. Spectrum of where where the apprentices are, what type of teams they're in. So it was. Yeah, it was basically my opportunity to go out on placement, be a student and basically take all the teaching and the learning opportunities that I could gain that I maybe wouldn't necessarily gain when I was back within my trust, within my own role, because I would obviously have a role to fulfil. And this is, again, this is where it's different. I'm not actually classed as a student when I'm working within my role. I'm a student out on placement and that's where my learning experience comes from.

Lee [01:08:27]

Braille. Braille does it, I suppose. I suppose my question, I'm trying to form it in the right way. I know we talked about the transition, but it is is it can it be a challenge almost from block to block. So you're in in your employed role and then you've got to transition again and put your student you learner hat on and then put you you know switch that back again. What does is that quite how do you manage that.

Katie [01:08:56]

Is difficult. And I would say again, this is something that I've spoken to supervisors like therapy managers with, and I am really well supported within my trust. I am within my team, the only OT apprentice at this time. So what I find difficult is when I am out on a teaching block, which is Monday to Friday, and then when I am on placement, which again could be eight weeks, ten weeks. I'm not sure whether. People are aware of where I am and what I'm doing. So I do think that's hard within the apprenticeship and also. The apprenticeship and how it's taught. A lot of it is some of it's distance learning and some of it's face to face teaching days. So a WhatsApp group was set up at the start of the apprenticeship, and it was basically a communication tool that could be used for the other OT apprentice students, because we're across the whole of the North-West and a lot of the teaching week,

some are face to face and some are online. You know, it's hard for people to meet up, and kind of hard really to gain relationships with your fellow students as well. Everyone is in different circumstances, personally and professionally. So I find as a student, that has helped me in a sense, if there's, you know, essays that are coming up or there's placements that are coming up and, you know, people are feeling a bit anxious about going out on placement. It's just been a nice way for everyone to maintain contact with each other and kind of air out anyone, if anyone's feeling anxious. I actually do think that coming back to work from placement and put me away hat on is very easy for me to do. And like I say, I've been in this team nine years now. I'm very comfortable in the team and I'm very well supported in the team from management as well. So the transition from placement back into work almost feels like I'm coming back home, right? It's the transition. I find hard leave and work something. An environment that I know very well. Going out on placement, you know, meeting new teams that I'm less familiar with, learn and new processes that I'm less from, I'm unfamiliar with, and the only kind of way that I find best to overcome that is just communicating that in supervisions with my new mentors. Although I might not show it on the outside that I'm worried about meeting new teams and being in a new environment, I can definitely feel it. Like inside. But I just find that communicating that with my mentors as a student, and, you know, and discussing. Anything that I felt nervous about going out on placement or anything that I could be struggling with from an academic point of view, whilst I'm on placement, I do feel like a student that's really, really helped me.

Lee [01:11:49]

So I actually think what you've raised there, Kate, is a really, really important point and actually a really good tip. For anyone undertaking any sort of practice, learning or placement around that communication with your, practice educators and. Discussing those anxieties and the benefits of clinical supervision, really, isn't it?

Katie [01:12:14]

Yeah. A mentor from one of my previous placements did actually say that. There is no silly question, so just ask as many questions as you possibly can. And I think almost keeping in the mindset as well, like everybody is being a student at some point. So your mentors on placement have been student and are being in the exact same situation as what I am currently. And, you know, hopefully in the future there'll be a time where I can. I have had positive experiences on all my placement. But if there's a time in the future where I become a mentor for somebody, that I can utilise my positive experiences and make somebody else's student placements experiences positive of what I've had.

Lee [01:12:59]

Oh, that's really wonderful. And I'm absolutely sure you will, Katie. I'm absolutely sure you will. So I just want to say thank you so much for coming to speak to me today. It was actually really, really beneficial and actually really beneficial for me to understand. The, apprenticeship journey a little bit more as well. So just thank you for sharing that with me.

Katie [01:13:23]

Thank you for inviting me.

Lee [01:13:27]

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