Physiotherapy in a clinical setting
Sarah Blasebalk initially began her career as a music therapist for patients with dementia, after studying music and psychology. After ten years of practice, Sarah decided to work in a different field of healthcare and retrained in physiotherapy. After graduating, she worked in a number of clinical settings, initially as a physiotherapy assistant, followed by bank and locum work, before securing a position with Barts Health NHS Trust. Since January 2014, Sarah has moved into an extremely varied, band 6 rotational role at the Whittington hospital in Archway, London.

’My new rotations are all elderly based and cover acute inpatients, A&E, orthopaedics, day hospital, day surgery and adult community. Elderly care is not viewed as a sexy or exciting area in physiotherapy. However, I truly believe that this group is more deserving of our treatment and attention than any other, and they should receive our respect, patience and care. My own beloved grandmother passed away recently and I hope that I can remember that all my patients are someone’s grandparent.’

Succeeding with a disability
As a physiotherapist, Sarah often has to work harder than her colleagues as she is visually impaired, having been born with a range of ophthalmological conditions. ’Working in the community has proved a challenge both clinically and visually. Clinically, it is hard to work in an environment where you do not have the most appropriate equipment, such as electric beds and practice steps. Visually, finding new places,
assessing and managing risks in strange environments, and lower lighting levels are all difficult.’

Whilst Sarah champions her line manager, colleagues and lecturers who have helped her with her professional success, she also stresses the importance of honesty when working with a disability. ’If you have any sort of disability, illness or impairment, do not try and hide it. If you are open and clear about your needs, other people will not feel awkward about asking you what they can do to help. Prejudice and fear are born of ignorance, but if you educate people and provide the opportunity to ask questions, most people will accept you and your situation.’

Team work
In her former role with Barts Health NHS Trust, Sarah was part of a community stroke rehabilitation rotation. ’I worked with patients of all ages and abilities in their own homes, community settings and work environments, helping to improve their independence and facilitate their return to normal life, as much as their stroke allowed.’ Sarah worked as part of a team of specialists, including occupational therapists, rehabilitation assistants and speech and language therapists, seeing up to four patients a day either alone or with another member of the team.

If you would like to speak to Sarah about working in healthcare with a disability, please email her on sarah.blasebalk@gmail.com.

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