

Ethos of physiotherapy - foundation learners

The physiotherapy ethos at Portland College is to empower the students to become as independent as possible with both physiotherapy, and functional skills required in day to day life. Our aim is to help students access, participate actively and succeed in their educational programmes. This ethos has been present over the last decade but is ever evolving to meet the changing requirements of our client group. Traditionally our main focus was on postural management for our students with physical disabilities, we also work with individuals with sensory difficulties and those who require general exercise to promote health and fitness.

In the first year of college we aim to develop rapport with the students, make baseline assessments and plan an appropriate course of physiotherapy treatment. For those learners with physical disabilities we aim to provide a postural management program that will be integrated into their main care plan if required. This helps to ensure postural management is carried out in the most appropriate place for the learner i.e. bedroom, classroom, gym or pool. Treatments not only involve the prescription of exercises but an explanation of their importance and development of individualised goals to take through their college life. All treatment offered is carried out with consent of the student involved.

Physiotherapy goals are made in collaboration with the student, and are a continual process throughout their time with us. Goals can range from practising transfers, independence skills, improving fitness, improving stamina and strength to complete activities of daily living, creating awareness of health and safety to gain access to community facilities, improving mobility, and working on a weight bearing program. Another aspect is postural management goals to reduce the risk of soft tissue shortening, increasing the likelihood of the student remaining in a functional posture to access the learning environment and ease moving handling for both the student and carer. We work alongside other therapists to work towards common goals, and promote MDT working.

If required the students wheelchairs are assessed for suitability and contact made with wheelchair services to sort out any problems. We also work closely with Speech and Language therapy and Augmentative Assisted Technology to assist in gaining access to computers, communication aids and mobility switches, which in-turn increase the students' independence around college. At Portland we use a wheelchair driving licence scheme to assess students driving abilities to ensure safety around college. We also look at the orthotics a student has or assess for requirement, the local NHS trust run an orthotics clinic once a month in college to assist with this.

Throughout the rest of the time at college we concentrate on consolidating the work done in first year. We aim to progress their exercises, continue with education around the use of gym equipment or pool environment and educate regarding their postural needs. We monitor any changing symptoms in the student's condition and develop solutions for the student to employ themselves or direct others in their use. For example, the use of stretches in the lower limbs to alleviate back pain, or having a break from sitting in the wheelchair in the middle of the day.

In order to prepare the student for life after college we develop an exercise or stretching programme which we photograph the student doing and use writing symbols and pictures to

develop a resource for them to use once leaving college. Initially the student is closely monitored and gradually reduces the supervision required over a period of time. If the student is unable to complete the exercises themselves we work on their ability to direct others on completing their stretching or postural management regime. We work on the premise that physiotherapy is not just work in the gym but equipping the students with a plan to assist in maintaining their abilities once they leave Portland.

The physiotherapists are involved in transition planning, advising on the need for physiotherapy provision when the student leaves and we attempt to find other therapy teams to refer into. We provide information to be included in the Health Action Plans which the learners take away with them, using photos to provide information on wheelchair set up, exercises, postural management and information on their sensory needs.

The physiotherapy team