London Olympic and Paralympic Games—students and graduates get involved

While we have heard lots of stories nationally about the dedicated team of physiotherapists who volunteered to support the Olympic athletes, some students have also been preparing to assist at the games in various ways. One of them is Claire Narborough, who has just started her second year on the BSc Physiotherapy course. We spoke to Claire as she was preparing to travel to Weymouth to support the GB paralympic sailing team. “I’ll be launching and landing the boats of the athletes, and maybe the power boats as well, and if needed assisting the athletes to get in and out of the boats”. Claire has been a keen sailor, since the age of twelve and is now a member of the university sailing team who sail locally at Bartley Green reservoir. She applied to be an Olympic volunteer before she started university and heard in January 2012 that she had been successful.

Claire will be attending a week of training in Weymouth, before the event starts on the 1st September. She says “I’ve never seen paralympic sailing before and I’m particularly interested in learning about the support needed for blind and deaf sailing”. Claire also points out some of the differences in the boats used for the races. “They are all keel boats, so they can’t capsize, and instead of big sticks to steer they have three little ropes to pull at the front, and a joystick like a computer. I’m sure they’ll be good to watch.” Claire is an instructor, so has also taught sailing to people with disabilities and has had some experience of sailing with children with cerebral palsy. She says “It opens your eyes to how people can get over any obstacle.” Overall Claire says “I’m looking forward to meeting lots of new people, both the athletes and the other volunteers. I’m also fascinated to see how everyone can work together to pull off such a big event.”

At the time of going to press you may have also seen Lora Turnham, one of our graduates competing in the paralympic track and road cycling. We congratulate her on two fourth place finishes in her events at her first paralympic games. We also had graduates representing Great Britain in the men’s and ladies’ goalball teams. We congratulate all of them, and all other university of Birmingham graduates and students who represented Team GB this summer.
Our MSc pre-registration Physiotherapy course is something we often get asked about as new areas begin to support this smaller number of students on placement. Students begin the course with a related degree and study for two years, rather than three, following a different structure from the BSc students. At our last clinical educator’s update day in April 2012 some of our current students met with clinical colleagues to discuss their backgrounds and their experiences on the course.

Emily Lord did a first degree in Sport and Exercise Science. She had already decided that she wanted to be a physiotherapist and knew that the MSc option existed. Doing work experience in sixth form, Emily heard negative views about the profession and graduate employment. She says “I thought maybe I should give myself some more career options and I had also considered becoming a PE teacher, which I would be able to do with the Sport and Exercise Science degree. I chose to do physiotherapy the longer way round hoping that things may get better for graduates. I am also more mature, have more life experience and am more able to consider a range of options than I was at 18”. Emily speaks of her experience on the course. “Overall I have enjoyed it. I knew it would be tough, but hadn’t quite anticipated how tough at times! The workload is high in the time that we have. The clinical practice side is definitely the most enjoyable and valuable. It’s where you really can learn and develop a whole range of skills and knowledge. Although generally I’ve had positive experiences there can be challenges. Occasionally it may be with student-educator relationships but sometimes the bigger challenge is your own confidence. Having educators that take the time weekly to discuss your learning needs and goals and who regularly encourage, guide, and instil confidence can really allow us to progress in our autonomy”  

Emily’s favourite clinical area so far has been respiratory, which she knew about before starting the course having friends with cystic fibrosis. She enjoyed studying respiratory modules and had a very positive experience on an intensive care and surgery placement. When asked what sets MSc students apart, Emily says “I’ve found with myself and other students that we take ownership and are quick to learn, even though we may not have all the practical skills and knowledge at our fingertips at the start of a placement. I think we can maybe come with greater array of life skills, depending on our experiences. Often we can work well in teams, can communicate more effectively and manage our workloads, as well as being compassionate and aware of the impact ill health/injury can have on patients, families and carers. Also, being a heavily research oriented course we enjoy discussion about patient care. In the future Emily plans to complete Band 5 rotations, with the aim of specialising in paediatric respiratory or intensive care, which she is hoping to complete a placement in later this year. In her summer break she has organised a placement in South Africa, working at a paediatric rehabilitation centre.

John Taylor, the second of our MSc students to be interviewed, came into the MSc course like Emily, having done a first degree in Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Birmingham. He says “In the sixth form I did human biology and PE. I thought the course would be something I would enjoy, and would give me a range of option, but I didn’t think much about careers. I found that my career opportunities relating to sports science were limited due to modules I had chosen, then I began to research physiotherapy as a profession. I wanted something to set myself apart from other graduates of sports science. I spoke to some MSc physiotherapy students who I met through playing rugby and then did some work experience in a rugby club before making up my mind to apply”. Despite coming from a sports background John has enjoyed learning about a diverse range of areas of physiotherapy. Please turn over for continuation of this story
MSc students—eclectic interests and backgrounds

He says “I’ve liked my placements in community intermediate care, neurology and neurosurgery. I also got to work with a rapid response team for acute medical patients, where I needed to develop lots of medical knowledge. I’m currently on a mental health placement, which has taught me lots about dealing with communication challenges. It’s also shown me how physiotherapy treatment can help a patient in different ways, like helping to improve depression and anxiety.”

On the differences between BSc and MSc students, John says “We are a bit more proactive about our learning. The teaching on the course is brief in places. I’ve done a lot of my learning on placement. Guidance from educators on appropriate reading really helps to bring us up to speed on what we need to know in that clinical area. One useful thing I’ve had was a weekly review looking at my goals, ways to improve and further learning experiences I could find. Also as placements progress it’s been good to be given more autonomy. Educators have given us the chance to complete a full assessment and then got involved if there is anything we’ve missed at the end”. John has organised a final placement in the Adult Intensive Care Unit at Bart’s and the London Hospitals after being given a contact and reference from a previous educator. He looks forward to the opportunity to develop his respiratory skills. Discussing his future plans John says “I would like to get a rotational post in the NHS, but I also need to earn some money, so would take any physiotherapy work. Further down the line I may want to specialise in musculoskeletal outpatients. I enjoy the autonomy of that setting and of being able to make independent decisions about a patient.”

Sanjay Mistry came onto the MSc course through a very different route, having studied pharmacology and physiology as an undergraduate at the University of the West of England in Bristol. He trained as research scientist for eight years, in this time completing a PhD at the University of Bristol on the regeneration of articular cartilage using adult stem cells from OA patients for hip resurfacing. Sanjay also worked as a post doctoral researcher for another three years on the development of a medical device for repairing meniscus tears for in-human clinical trials. He says “I decided that didn’t want to do short-term research contracts any more. I always wanted to work with people in some form of rehabilitation so I went for some careers advice. I was living a healthy lifestyle so I wanted to promote health. I had a fascination with neurology and neurological rehabilitation from studying brain injury at undergraduate level. Those have always been my passions so I wanted to go back to them”.

Sanjay discovered some new areas, which he didn’t realise a physiotherapist would work in. He says “I’m enjoying my current neurological rehabilitation placement and have also enjoyed community working. It’s really great to see goals translate from clinic to home. I like building rapport with people over a period of time”. He also highlights some challenges associated with becoming a student again. He says “As you become older, you become more sure of your ideas and used to being more in charge. You need to start thinking and developing yourself differently when you become a student again. You have to re-learn to learn again. I used to supervise students and now I’m the student.” Positive experiences on placement have been where educators have been able to put themselves in his shoes. “If you are supporting an MSc student on placement”, he says, “think about what it would be like to have a career change and the commitment and pressure we may put ourselves under to succeed. It might be harder to mould the student to your way of thinking, so for me open and honest communication is key, constructive criticism as well as positive feedback as much as possible. Try finding out what works early on and try to get the best out of us just like we try to with our patients. In addition due to the structure of our course and the level of self directed study, switching clinical areas between placements can also be difficult.”

Sanjay—an interest in community work

Here is our new website address, which has slightly changed:
www.birmingham.ac.uk/clinicalphysio

The site now looks a little different but we continue to use it as an information resource for educators and students. It houses lots of information about all aspects of supporting students on placement. The site has everything from marking guides and student assessment documentation, to specific module details for the BSc and MSc courses and answers to your frequently asked questions. We are continually updating the website and welcome your feedback at any time on any aspect of its content.
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New for 2012 – Two exciting new programmes!

**MSc/PGDip Exercise and Sports Medicine (Football)**
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/med/exercise-sports-medicine-football.aspx

Contact: Alison Rushton: a.b.rushton@bham.ac.uk
Developed with the Football Association (FA), this programme is aimed at physiotherapists and doctors working, or interested in football medicine. Unique features of the programme include the delivery of two specialist modules at The Football Association’s National Football Centre, St George's Park at Burton on Trent, anatomy development within the prossectorium, and practice mentorship within a football/sports medicine environment. Modules will be available as stand alone.

**MRes Health Research  (Funding may be available)**
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/combined/med/health-research.aspx
Contact: Alison Rushton: a.b.rushton@bham.ac.uk. A combined research and taught programme. This is a first step in research training for allied health professionals and nurses currently working in clinical areas and is intended as a programme of study preceding a traditional MPhil/PhD pathway in developing a career in health related research and those seeking a more clinical academic career.

Our existing programmes are still recruiting:

**MSc/PGDip Advanced Manipulative Physiotherapy**
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/med/advanced-manipulative-physio.aspx
Contact: Nicola Heneghan - n.heneghan@bham.ac.uk

**MSc/PGDip Advancing Practice**
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/med/advancing-practice.aspx
Contact: Carolyn Roskell - c.a.roskell@bham.ac.uk

**MSc/PGDip Health Studies**
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/med/health-studies.aspx
Contact: Clive Liles – c.r.liles@bham.ac.uk

A wide range of exciting modules is available at: http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/cpd/mdslisting.aspx

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Roz Madeley has been one of our clinical educators for many years, based at West Heath Hospital. On the eve of her retirement we spoke to Roz about her career and involvement with students. Roz trained as a physiotherapist at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, beginning in 1972. She was attracted to physiotherapy because of the variety it offered, but realised later how little she and her colleagues knew initially about the job role, particularly respiratory care. “It has a much higher profile now”, she says “with physiotherapists in sport and the Olympics.” Roz’s early career saw her working at Heartlands Hospital and the Royal Orthopaedic in a range of areas, but particularly enjoying gym work, and being a key player in the opening of the hydrotherapy pool there. She moved to West Heath Rehabilitation Hospital in 1988, when her younger son was a toddler after a spell at the old Joseph Sheldon Hospital in Rubery. Roz recalls lots of changes during her 24 years. She remembers “A much bigger hospital, including a day hospital which has now been demolished for new housing. Patients admitted here used to be in their 70’s, now with the ageing population there are lots of 90 year olds. It is encouraging that you’ve got lots of time left for retirement. Lots of services have also moved into the community. In the hospital lots of subacute or more chronically ill patients. Patients can be discharged within 3 weeks now, whereas in the past there were long stay patients in for many months. The way which we get our admissions has also changed with rapid response teams, and some patients admitted straight from the Clinical Decisions Unit”.

Roz has had lots of involvement with University of Birmingham students, particularly those on the MSc pre-registration course. She says “It was a bit daunting at first, having done a diploma myself, not even a BSc. I was worried that the students would be super clever, that I might have to teach them something extra, more high-powered, because they’re an MSc student.” However Roz soon realised “Most of it is just teaching the key physiotherapy skills in your area, the same as you would do with any other student. The students really want to do well. I’ve found that they have valued and used the comments we’ve given. It’s nice to have emails from past students to let us know how they are getting on”. On challenges related to students Roz says “I have found that marking is the hard part. You get to know the student over six weeks, have dialogue with them and it doesn’t really come naturally to give judgements. Overall I’ve really enjoyed working with students. It’s good to have young people around with new ideas and enthusiasm, and often better IT skills than us! They also make you think and question what you do. We get as much out of it as they do.”

Regarding her future plans, Roz says she is looking forward to retirement. She says “It will be nice to spend more time at the allotment. I’d also like to travel more in this country, visit family. I have a sister in Cumbria, and a son, soon to get married who also lives away. I also like painting and sketching, which I don’t get time to do now. I would like to learn a language. Like a lot of physios I’m very practical, very active, my days are always structured. I will find it difficult to prioritise the ‘guilty things’ I enjoy. We wish Roz the very best of luck in her retirement and thank her for her great contribution to the future of the profession through student education. We are sure she will be remembered by many of our graduates.