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Discover the Orthotic
& Prosthetic Profession



review

TAKING THE NEXT STEP



Endless possibilities ... building a career based on O&P

With O&P as a starting point, career development can take any number of directions. Jackie O'Connor reflects on some of her options and decisions made as she took some of the key steps in her career to date.

An early hunger for learning

My career began as many do, by moving interstate for a graduate position. I was determined my first job would have opportunities to learn a broad range of prosthetic and orthotic treatment options as I didn't have a preference for either area and was hungry to learn more. I enjoyed this role and my interstate move but soon found my learning slowing and being limited to a certain area. Only 18 months in, I began to consider my options:

- ▶ Return to university to study another profession? Had I got my choice wrong?
- ▶ Try a different employer
- ▶ Try moving into something other than clinical practice – research perhaps?

I moved to a different O&P role and was provided with many opportunities to continue learning. I was mentored by a range of people, I consolidated my orthotic skills and was given an opportunity to educate others in the area and involvement in research was facilitated. I began to realise how different seemingly similar O&P roles could be and that already I had skills that could benefit others.

The value of mentors

My now lifelong mentor Sally Cavenett, also encouraged me to volunteer with AOPA at this time. AOPA opened my eyes to the world of healthcare beyond direct client to practitioner care and allowed me to work with leaders of the profession around the nation.

The results:

- expanded professional network, knowledge and skills
- a chance to taste different things in a low risk way; i.e. little change to my life and a simple get out clause if I didn't like it
- identified my strengths and interests
- confidence to pursue chosen areas.

I was really consolidating and broadening my skills through the variety of exposure I was receiving.

Like many though, I wanted to travel. I used my O&P experience to work overseas and gained benefits I hadn't thought about, such as:

- exposure to different ways of doing things – clinically, technically and systems wise
- a broader network of colleagues and mentors to draw on
- experience in the public and private sector.

All the differences and exposure gave me confidence and ideas.

Focusing and consolidating

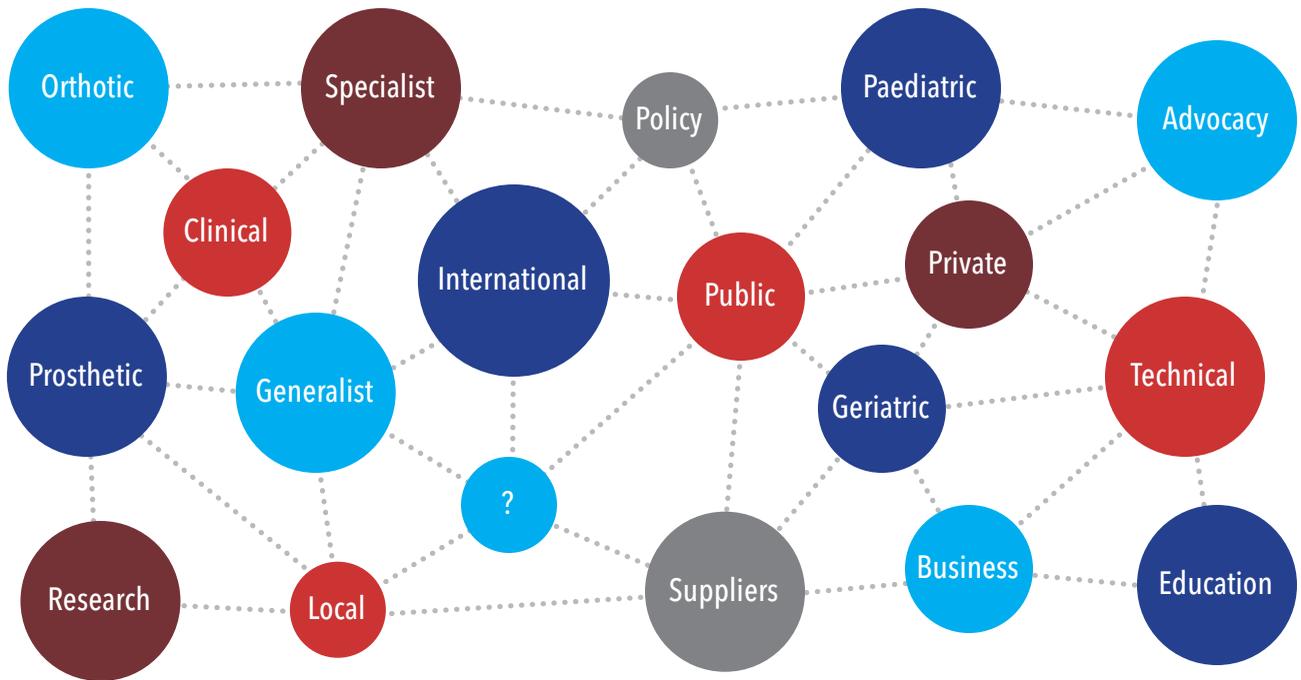
Returning from overseas it was time to start focusing on my preferred areas to work and how I could best utilise the experience I had gained to date; for the benefit of others and to make my work as enjoyable as possible. I decided to focus on prosthetics and worked privately for some time. My volunteering with AOPA recommenced and I chaired the inaugural AOPA congress. Again, this role gave me wider experience than I'd previously had; budgets and reporting, co-ordinating others, increased exposure to the supplier side of the profession.

My desire to keep learning and improve the lives of as many people as possible was itching at me to consider what was next, so I again considered my options:

- Work with suppliers
- Find ways to be involved with technical innovation
- Education roles
- Research roles
- Management roles.

I chose to move to a public facility where my role still entailed lots of time to treat but again enabled research participation and new learning in the area of budget management with the view of perhaps one day moving into O&P department management.





Furthering education and responsibility

To me progressing to management was a way of being able to effect change for all, colleagues and clients. It's funny to me that we all study something like O&P for so long but then think we can just be a role as important as a manager. So, I chose to further my education and enrolled in a Master of Health Service Management that focused on service evaluation and planning.

My opportunity to tackle the role of manager came much faster than expected, not long after beginning my studies. However, I continued in the study as I could see how it benefited my development in the role. Management helped me:

- Build more general business skills
- Work on inter-personal skills
- Understand an organisation in its broader sense and context both internally and externally
- Opened my eyes further to the enormous challenges of sustainable, effective and efficient healthcare.

My study was progressing slowly, yet my drive to positively influence things on a larger scale remained unfulfilled in this role, once again it was option considering time!

- ▶ Upper management – Allied Health Manager and hopefully beyond
- ▶ Administration - insurance schemes, government funding bodies, hospitals
- ▶ Advocacy, Policy development, Accrediting bodies, Associations
- ▶ Research

Affecting change on a larger scale

It was my love of the O&P profession and the drive to make it what it needs to be for clients that motivated me to take a role with AOPA.

As Project Officer and Manager of Advocacy and Policy with AOPA my learning continued and my experience was applied in a

different manner to the past. Whilst in this role I gained a greater appreciation of what the policy makers were trying to achieve with their policies than I'd had as a practitioner and manager. As a result, I became passionate about trying to bridge the gap between policy makers and practitioners to ensure policy implementation achieves its intention.

Enabling choice and fulfilment

A baby arrival and chronic disease diagnosis collided, delivering me with the toughest time of my life, mentally, physically and personally. A situation like this makes you analyse your options no matter how many times you have done it before! The experience drove me to complete my Masters in the research stream and look at person centred care experiences among Diabetes Educator services.

Personally, it meant I wanted to create a flexible life for myself so that my need to manage my health didn't impact my employment or family. At this point I broadly considered two options that I thought would fulfil all the personal and work drivers, dreams and preferences I had:

- ▶ Project and consultancy work
- ▶ Own clinical practice

As a result, I recently founded Allied Health Specialist Consultants (AHSC), a company determined to assist consumers to benefit from efficient and effective health services. This is purposely broad to ensure it continues to fulfil that lifelong learning bug I have.

I'm so pleased to be a part of the niche community that is Orthotists/Prosthetists. However, I now know that by using an O&P degree as a basis for lifelong skill building, working to your strengths and preferences, valuing mentors and exploring new paths, there are endless possibilities for where this degree can take you. I truly believe the health system and its clients will be better for the expansion of our profession into many different areas ●