Orthopaedic practitioner

Orthopaedic practitioners apply casts and splints to keep limbs and joints in position while they heal. Find out how to train as an orthopaedic practitioner.

This page has information on the role of the orthopaedic practitioner, including entry requirements and skills needed.

Working life

As an orthopaedic practitioner, you'll apply casts and splints to patients following an accident or surgery or for particular orthopaedic conditions. Casts and splits are used to keep limbs and joints in position while they heal.

You'll need to use the most suitable technique and material. Casts can be made from

- plaster of Paris
- fibreglass
- polypropylene
You may also

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- advise patients after the splint or cast has been fitted, sometimes over the phone
- apply dressings to wounds
- remove dressings and stitches from wounds
- remove casts and splints
- order supplies
- update patients' records

You may be known as a casting technician or plaster technician.

Orthopaedic practitioners work in trauma and orthopaedic clinics. They may work with patients of all ages and conditions or they may specialise in, for example, children or older people.

Orthopaedic practitioners work with healthcare professionals such as nurses [1].

**Entry requirements?**

Vacancies to train as an orthopaedic practitioner are rarely advertised. It may be possible to enter by working as a healthcare assistant [2] or clinical support worker [3] in a trauma and orthopaedic clinic. Once you have experience of working with patients you could approach the casting room staff to ask for an opportunity to get experience of casting work.

Employers expect good numeracy and literacy. They may ask for GCSEs. Employers may also ask for a qualification such as an NVQ or BTEC in health care.

**Skills and personal characteristics**

As an orthopaedic practitioner, you need to be

- confident and reassuring
- able to deal with people who are upset
- happy to be hands-on with patients
- willing to work with messy materials
- able to follow procedures
- able to work quickly and carefully
- able to work alone or in a team

You'll also need

- good manual (hand) skills
- organisation skills
- good communication skills
- the ability to explain treatment to patients and to offer advice as appropriate
Training and development?

To become a fully qualified orthopaedic practitioner, you need to take the British Casting Certificate. You can take the five-week course as a block or by day release. To get on the course, you need at least a year’s experience of casting work.

- Pay and conditions

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  Clinical support staff working in the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change (AfC) [4] pay system. As an orthopaedic practitioner you will typically start on AfC [5] band 3. With further training and experience, you could apply for more senior positions at bands 4 and 5. Orthopaedic practitioners work standard hours of around 37.5 a week. They may work shifts, which could involve nights, early starts, evennings and weekends. Terms and conditions will usually be different for clinical support staff working outside of the NHS.

- Where the role can lead

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  You could progress to senior roles within the plaster room. You could apply to train as an assistant practitioner [6]?or with the appropriate qualifications for entry to university, train as a healthcare professional such as nurse [1], physiotherapist [7], or prosthetist/orthotist [8].

- Job market and vacancies

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  Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [9]. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations on NHS Choices [10].

  If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work.

  Find out more about NHS values [11].

- Further information

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  - Association of Orthopaedic Practitioners [12]
  - British Orthopaedic Association [13]
  - Orthopaedic and Trauma Alliance [14]

Other roles that may interest you

- Prosthetic technician [15]
- Prosthetist/orthotist [16]
- Experienced paramedic [17]
- Emergency care assistant [18]