

# "Being an osteopath is a very rewarding job. There are opportunities to progress your career as well as flexibility in the hours I work."

Andrew left the Royal Navy thinking his next career would be based on his existing skills. Then his osteopath suggested osteopathy as a career to him and now he's an osteopath and research lead.

## Andrew MacMillan

### Osteopath and research lead

#### Employer or university

University College of Osteopathy  
Andrew MacMillan

### How I got into the role

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I served as an engineering technician (weapon engineering) in the Royal Navy before leaving in 2011. When thinking about my career outside the Forces, my thoughts naturally focused on using my existing skills and perhaps working as an electrician; a career as an allied health professional (AHP) was far from my thoughts.

I've had ongoing back pain from an early age and had the personal experience of seeing an osteopath. I found it very interesting and that same osteopath suggested it as a career to me.

I had very few qualifications before joining the navy, but I did the Royal Navy literacy and numeracy equivalency tests (LANTERN) which enabled me to gain further training.

My university accepted a combination of the LANTERN test results, completion of a massage course and personal training course at a local college, and my life experience as a way of gaining access to the course.

I found I had to learn lots of new skills for studying and to adapt to university, but I loved it and eventually completed a Master's in osteopathy and a postgraduate medical education qualification.

## **What I do**

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My current role is a mix of teaching and private practice. My teaching role involves supervising undergraduate and MSc research projects. For private practice, I work in a rehabilitation role primarily with children with disabilities. I use a mix of manual therapy, such as stretching and movements, and exercise prescription. Prior to specialising in paediatrics, I worked with athletes and sports people.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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Being an osteopath is a very rewarding job; there are opportunities to progress your career as well as flexibility in the hours I work. I can work as much or as little as I like and have the choice of the area I want to specialise in. It is a financially rewarding career and offers me the chance to help people. I'm never bored, and I never stop learning.

I like to see the development of students as they acquire the skills to be independent practitioners. In my clinical role I love seeing patients regain confidence in their bodies and get back to the things they enjoy. Recently I treated a young man who ran for the first time in two years following a hip operation.

I would say my biggest challenge as a clinician is communication. In a limited amount of time, I need to be able to discuss complex information with patients and make sure they've understood it. It's important to find out what really matters to patients so I can best advise and help them.

At times it's a balance between listening and guiding. I want to be truthful but do not want to scare them and that can be tricky. I consider it a 'goldilocks' scenario, particularly with rehabilitative exercise and getting the right amount - not too much and not too little. My job is very rewarding when things go well but also challenging and I spend a lot of time keeping up to date with the new information and research available. At least it's never boring!

## **Life outside work**

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I am currently studying a doctorate in education so don't have lots of free time! But I enjoy weight training and cooking.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

### **Expand / collapse**

Whether or not you're leaving the armed forces, go for it if you're considering a career in an allied health profession! Look at all the options and see what suits you. You are more than capable of doing it and have some key skills and experience that will make you really stand out.

The core values of the armed forces - team work, commitment and discipline - are shared across the allied health professions, although expressed in a different way. Communication is a huge part of my role, as is working under pressure. The armed forces gave me a huge advantage in this aspect, as well as the discipline and time management skills that are essential to complete the course.

It's a hard journey with lots of challenges, but nothing compared to what you have already done. It can be a great career for life with a supportive and interesting team. If I can do it anyone can. It just takes dedication and hard work.

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