

# "A highlight was walking a Covid-19 survivor off the ward to a guard of honour after ten weeks in hospital."

David's career in the military was much shorter than he would have wished, but it helped to prepare him for life as a physiotherapist.

## David Williams

### Rotational physiotherapist

#### Employer or university

University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust  
Rotational physiotherapist David Williams

### How I got into the role

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I achieved my childhood ambition of joining the Royal Marines in 2012. I'd always wanted to be in the military and thought I would have a long career there.

However, a series of injuries caused me to be medically discharged after only three and a half years, and it was clear that I would have to start mapping out a very different future for myself.

My experiences of injury rehabilitation had brought me into close contact with physiotherapists and whilst coping with recovery and the emotional upheaval of major change, I started to wonder if physiotherapy might be a new career for me. I was looking for a role where I could really make a difference in people's lives and I wanted to continue to serve the public and my community.

I then applied to a local college and completed an Access to Higher Education Diploma, after which I studied physiotherapy at the University of Nottingham where I graduated with a 1st class honours degree.

## **What I do**

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I am a rotational physiotherapist which means I rotate to different departments after a period of time, maximising my learning and development. My rotations have been on several medical wards although Covid-19 has changed things.

My day starts with a multidisciplinary meeting where all staff discuss the patients currently on the ward to ensure they receive the best care. I then prioritise my patient list and organise my day with the other therapists and delegate if needed.

My day can be very varied but ultimately it will involve assessing new patients holistically with a person-centered approach, and rehabilitating patients to maximise their physical function. This includes improving mobility, stair assessments and strength exercises.

I may also have to assess and treat patients with respiratory <sup>[1]</sup> conditions through a variety of techniques and if required I will escalate medically unwell patients. I will produce rehabilitation plans to motivate my patient. Also, I will collaborate with my colleagues and the patient's family to produce a discharge plan so that the patient can return home in a safe and timely manner.

Covid-19 has greatly changed the way I worked as I was allocated to the Covid-19 wards. My responsibilities have increased and I have had to cover different wards and specialties. I have also had to learn and understand new respiratory <sup>[1]</sup> techniques to help support patients who are very unwell. This has included 'proning' patients (placing them flat on their abdomen with their chest and face down) and non-invasive ventilation. I have also had the privilege of rehabilitating Covid-19 survivors who have been stepped down from critical care. This has been an intensive and long process due to the debilitating effects of the virus and the effects of deconditioning from long stays in critical care.

I have had to be flexible as we moved to seven-day working and I got used to uncomfortable and hot personal protective equipment (PPE). Overall, this has been a challenging but rewarding experience that has been the highlight of my physiotherapy career.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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I get to experience the smile from a patient when they achieve something they thought they couldn't and that feels amazing.

I love working with patients and building a professional relationship with them. Their personal stories lighten my day and this helps to motivate them.

A highlight was walking a Covid-19 survivor off the ward, to a guard of honour. He had spent over ten weeks in hospital and could now return home to his family.

Prioritising and working through a long list of patients can be difficult when there is pressure in the hospital to release beds to waiting patients.

Recently, working in the heat with full PPE during Covid-19 has been difficult.

## **Life outside work**

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I enjoy walking and running in the forest near where I live. I am obsessed with coffee and ice-lollies!

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

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Although my career in the military was much shorter than I would have wished, it helped to prepare me for life as a physiotherapist.

Communication and teamwork are essential core skills of any successful physiotherapist and these 'soft skills' directly cross over from the military. Also, the discipline and resilience you build in the military during arduous conditions will prepare you for studying hard for a degree and the pressures of working in the NHS.

If you are leaving the armed forces and considering an allied health profession, have a clear plan. Prepare like you did when you wanted to join the forces and you will succeed.

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**Links**

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Respiratory>