

Take a seat, coffee in hand, it's Conference time.

By Caroline Abbott with Will Gregory

Conference season is very much upon of us; I do hope you will join us on 16th November for the AStretch Conference. A lucky few of you are perhaps currently packing for Atlanta, Georgia and the American College of Rheumatology conference kicking off there later this week. Or maybe you are just recovering from a weekend away at Physiotherapy UK?

So, why do we do it?

There is a decent evidence base with regards to the benefits for the individual of attending a conference. Not all of these benefits as obvious. A recent study found "increased enthusiasm and a greater sense of belonging in the scientific community" (Gopalan 2018). Other studies have had more mixed results with regards to benefits of conference attendance (Rowe 2018).

I could say more, but am very keen to share the experiences of a colleague who had their first conference just a few days ago. Caroline was so enthused by the meeting, that she not only took up the offer of writing the following, but also submitted it within 12 hours of being asked for it!

Will



Hi, I am Caroline. I am a proud Chartered Physiotherapist and non-medical prescriber. I am also a trainee Advanced Clinical Practitioner who is 18 months into an Advanced Clinical Practice Msc. I work for the Complex Spinal team and Major Trauma team at Salford Royal Foundation Trust. This year I had a poster presentation at Physiotherapy UK 2019 and I would like to share with you why I think physiotherapist, advanced practitioners and other health care professionals should consider attending and submitting work to more conferences.

Coffee in hand, taking my seat in the founder's lecture at Physiotherapy UK 2019 I looked around and was in awe of how many physiotherapy colleagues were in one room. It was hopefully going to be two days of learning, new experiences and being inspired. What I did not realise is that it would be so much more; networking, confidence building, sharing experiences, being inspired, being reassured - just to name a few.

The posters displayed at the conference highlighted the expansive breadth and variety of the physiotherapy role with posters from tracheostomy weaning and lung ultrasound to paediatric case studies and digital advances. I was lucky that my team's poster was among the posters selected. Not only did the wide variety of posters promote the profession but it also highlighted the innovative practice that is ongoing across the country. This provided opportunities for teams to showcase their service, share best practice and inspire colleagues. I certainly found this thought provoking and found myself reflecting on my services strengths, and areas for improvement.

A large part of the weekend was networking, with sessions designed to encourage discussion. I found this valuable, discussing with colleagues their similar experiences, successes and challenges in a relaxed environment over a cup of tea. While this may sound simplistic it is sometimes the smallest of things – like a cup of tea that breaks down barriers, allowing people to talk more honestly and openly. This encouraged me to have discussions with my own team members, network with other colleagues and share contact details for further sharing of best practice and learning. Coincidentally I sat next to another Trainee Advanced Practitioner who was a twitter follower and we shared experiences of our Advanced Practice journey. I have to say this was a fantastic bit of Continuous Professional Development.

A theme of the conference was to “empower” and “lead”, whilst I listened to Beverley Harden (AHP Lead for Health Education England) discuss the ongoing development of Advanced Practice in physiotherapy I could not help feel proud of my profession and its' future. This inspired me to consider how I would empower colleagues to lead on the future of healthcare and promote physiotherapy. I also came away with a sense of enthusiasm about my ongoing role as a Physiotherapist and an Advanced Practitioner. I must say that this excitement was not lacking prior to the conference, far from it. However, there is something exceptionally powerful about sitting in a presentation and attending a conference with colleagues from your Trust and profession, who are leaders who have driven through the “professional ceiling”.

Another fantastic opportunity was to learn about the most recent evidenced-based best practice. Whether you were interested in strength training, mental health in MSK or best types of CPD, it was all there and I was able to dip in and out of sessions that were of interest. Importantly I was able to identify areas that were appropriate for my job alongside areas of interest and tailor the weekend to me – something you do not always have the privilege to do during training days.

Reflecting on the conference I can honestly say that it was inspiring, whilst being a fantastic learning and networking opportunity. However, it resonated with me that not all specialist areas and levels of the profession were well represented. Despite this it enhanced my enthusiasm for physiotherapy leadership and progression. I am not saying that all conferences are the same but Physiotherapy UK 2019 really did set the bar high

and I would strongly encourage all levels of health professionals to consider attending and submitting work to future conferences – it can only benefit the patient, who of course is the reason we are all here. So, my question to you all is which conference are you attending next? As per Karen Middleton(Chief Executive of CSP), I think I will end on the final words of the conference, I will be attending more conferences and “I will plan to succeed”.



Caroline

Rowe, N. (2018) When you get what you want, but not what you need: The motivations, affordances and shortcomings of attending academic/scientific conferences. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science* (IJRES), 4(2), 714-729. DOI:10.21890/ijres.438394

Gopalan C, Halpin PA, Johnson KMS (2018) Benefits and logistics of nonpresenting undergraduate students attending a professional scientific meeting. *Advanced in Physiology Education* <https://doi.org/10.1152/advan.00091.2017>