

Partner in Recovery

By Chiara Singh

A PASSION FOR HEALTH CARE AND SPORTS MEET IN THIS SURREY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL PHYSIOTHERAPIST



I'm a physiotherapist at Surrey Memorial Hospital (SMH) and I've always been interested in health care. My mom was an X-ray technician and she told me that working in a hospital was very exciting and challenging. I was involved in a lot of sports growing up, so I was looking for something to tie together health care and sports. Then when I was in Grade 10, my friend was diagnosed with bone cancer and ended up having part of the bone in her arm removed. Just seeing her in the hospital and

during her recovery inspired me to go into physiotherapy.

I graduated from UBC in 1998 with a Bachelor of Rehabilitation Science degree and my first job was here at SMH. I got to experience physiotherapy in a lot of different areas: intensive care, orthopedics and outpatient services. I was able to get involved in the pediatrics program and took a clinical supervisor position in 2005 that covered pediatrics, which includes cancer patients, and adult surgery rehabilitation, which includes breast cancer surgery patients.

My patients are so inspiring. One of them was a 12-year-old named Darren who had a cancerous brain tumour removed and then couldn't walk or use his right arm. I worked with him for over a year while he was undergoing cancer treatment and now he's able to run again. There were times when he would get frustrated, but he kept persevering and ended up getting to a place that no one thought he would be able to get to.

That's the kind of patient interaction that I love. I think our role as physiotherapists is to be a partner and to motivate our patients. To be a true partner you can't just consider a patient's physical state, you have to consider their motivation and go along on their ups and downs and adapt to their emotional needs. It takes a really positive person, someone who can solve problems and has a good connection with people. Teaching is also a big

component of our job. I also teach at UBC and volunteer as a triathlon coach for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada and for the Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia.

This job allows me to do all the things I love: interact with patients, motivate people, teach, coach, develop programs and do research. I live in Vancouver and I drive to Surrey because of the culture here. We don't just manage our own caseload, we help each other, and there is always someone to bounce ideas off or to answer questions. We're quite social and supportive and it's a really fun environment to work in. We push each other to be better physiotherapists and provide the best care we can for our patients.

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People still tend to think of physiotherapy in terms of sports injuries, but there's so much variety. There are a lot of opportunities now because of our aging population and because physiotherapy is playing a bigger role in prevention. It's also quite a physical job and you need to be adaptable and to work well with a team. When I started, I never thought I would be working with patients with cancer, but when I look back at what inspired me, it seems like this was where I was meant to be.

Chiara Singh is the Clinical Supervisor for Physiotherapy for the maternal, child and youth and surgical programs in Surrey Memorial Hospital's Rehabilitation Services Department. She told her story to Elaine O'Connor.

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