



Inspirational trainer

Hours of research and continuing professional development have earned PT Tom Higo respect from the medical profession.

You recently presented a talk to medical professionals and the Newcastle United sports doctor tweeted his praise. Tell us more.

I spoke about rehabilitation for femoroacetabular impingement in the hip. The audience was GPs, surgeons and physiotherapists and I advised them how PTs can fit into their arsenal and what role we can play post-op.

Personal trainers *can* offer a lot to medical professionals. We're looking at health and fundamental movement patterns in a broader sense – we tend to go to a physiotherapist or doctor with a very specific problem and, due to demand, time is very limited in these professions, with anything from a 10- to 30-minute treatment, whereas we are fortunate to have an hour's worth of time to develop a relationship and understand the client. The extra time and frequency in my opinion makes it easier to create a strong bond and allow us to look at health and fitness as a whole. A personal trainer has the opportunity to correct movement patterns before they manifest into injury, and promote healthy eating and lifestyle habits, helping to build a healthy immune system. In some instances, we can be the first line of defence. Prevention is better than the cure.

How do you build a valuable relationship with a GP or physio?

Communication is key. I will refer my clients to physiotherapists if I think they need it and, if I have a client who is referred to me by a physio

or GP, I will constantly liaise with that medical professional. They've entrusted me with their patient, so it's respectful to give them feedback. Every time I see the patient, I update the medical professional on what we did, why and any changes. Most importantly, you have to remain humble and don't be afraid to ask questions. We're not medically trained. We've got to listen and learn and that's how we gain the respect and confidence of medical professionals.

Do you feel it's tough for fitness professionals to gain respect?

Not if we communicate with them and ask for help. There is no doubt you can get qualified quite easily and so medical professionals understandably could lose confidence in the profession. If we are dedicated and continue to work hard, with continued professional development in the way of courses and mentorship from leaders within the industry, we can gain more respect from other professions. As PTs we have to constantly learn; the health industry is progressing rapidly with huge sums of money being spent each year on research. In order to keep up to date and give our clients the best possible service, we must continue to develop ourselves.

I invest 20% of my earnings back into my development. I read books and liaise (where possible) with the industry leaders, and aim for an hour a day to continually learn. Don't look at it as a business. I've just completed quite an expensive course but will I earn from it from a business perspective? No, not really. Will it help my clients? Absolutely.

I would love to see us as a profession being governed a little more and compulsory CPD hours being put in place.

Can you tell us about one of the clients you train?

I'm currently working with a young boy who had cancer in his foot. He had his leg amputated below the knee. His goal is to get back to running 400m competitively; it's an extremely humbling experience and his attitude, dedication and determination towards his goal are inspiring.

His programme initially started with floor-based exercise, ensuring he is engaging the core correctly and teaching the right muscles to

do the right job. Once the core was engaged, I progressed his movement from floor to half kneeling, to kneeling, to standing and then back into more dynamic movement over a period of months, constantly liaising with the relevant medical professionals and Pilates practitioners, which was invaluable. We all have a slightly different approach and it helped me to look at programming from a slightly different angle, ultimately allowing me to build a better programme for my client.

How do you motivate clients who have an overwhelming obstacle to climb?

Sometimes clients don't want a load of answers; they want a sounding board. I'll listen and make adjustments based on what they say and I'll never be judgemental. You've got to make sure they know they can say anything to you. I don't know how it feels to go through cancer or what it's like to lose a limb, so I don't counsel. I listen.

How do you see the industry progressing?

The future is exciting if the industry goes in the right direction. I would like to see a governing body put in place to encourage our professional development further.

I think every PT should have some form of mentorship. I can train in excess of 50 sessions a week, so my time is limited. I pay a monthly fee for a mentorship programme and I will actively research more into the subjects being addressed each month. It's important for us to realise that we don't know everything. We have to be willing to learn every day. With that attitude, I believe we can all be successful.

Interview: Aislinn Kelly