

# Raising a glass to theatre Jedi: Recognising National ODP Day 2023

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MAY

FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Guest editorial by Oliver Tierney

**Sit writing this guest editorial in a seaside cafe in Portrush, Northern Ireland, with National ODP Day on the horizon. Very much like the crisp spring sun shining off the crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean, I have become quite reflective on my career as an Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) and how far this once hidden profession has evolved over the years.**

You see, dear reader, it was not always supposed to be this way. When I left school, I had been accepted onto a Degree in English Literature and Politics and had decided to take a gap year before venturing into higher education. My plan was simple, continue working at the Go-Kart Track on New Brighton Promenade, and sing in the distinctly average cover band that had been part of my life throughout sixth form. This all changed one Sunday morning when my mother, a theatre matron at a local district general, announced that she had 'got' me a job in theatre as a Health Care Assistant (HCA). My protest, I as you would expect, fell on deaf ears and a week later I began my career in the operating theatre.

The first case I ever experienced was an amputation of a big toe, once the amputation was complete, the surgeon accidentally dropped the big toe on the floor while passing it to the scrub practitioner. In my eagerness to impress, I picked up the aforementioned toe, and before anyone could stop me, I very politely placed it onto the instrument trolley. The theatre fell silent, and realising my mistake, I began to apologise only for the scrub practitioner to let out a little chuckle and with a knowing wink said 'We've all been there' (thank you, Lynn Doyle).

It was during this time, as a HCA in theatre, that I began to fall in love with the role of the ODP, a practitioner who could work in all areas of the operating theatre and across multiple areas of the hospital as a whole. Fast forward four years, and I had qualified as an ODP, cutting my teeth in Cardio-thoracic before finding my home in Neuro at The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust, where I am now the Clinical Lead for Education, Risk and Governance.

It is amazing to think that when compared to nursing, midwifery etc, that the role of the ODP is still very much in its infancy. From its debated genesis as the assistance to the barber surgeons

of Victorian Britain, to its long overdue recognition in the 1971 Lewin Report and the current day, where practitioners are now studying at master's level and taking on extended roles across all aspects of the operating theatre and beyond. Even our title has changed multiple times as we slowly made our way to be recognised professionals; Operating Theatre Technicians became Operating Department Assistants and, finally, we became Operating Department Practitioners identifying the role was a profession in its own right.

So, as the sun begins to set across the North Coast of County Antrim, I ask myself, do I regret not pursuing a Degree in English Literature and Politics, and a potential career as an international rock star? Not a jot! My career as an ODP has allowed me to work with incredible people and practitioners, care for patients in both good and bad times, and experience specialties that have both challenged and inspired. As we approach National ODP Day, I ask that we all raise a glass to these theatre Jedi, these multi skilled ninjas and look forward to the further evolution of a profession that is only just getting started. ■

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