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ATLANTA, GA

AN ADVERTISING PUBLICATION | APRIL 2015 | VOL. 23, NO. 3

# Pulse

For the health care professional



## A look at therapeutic services

We meet three therapists  
and learn about career  
options in this booming field

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## COVER STORY

# A career in therapeutic services

## Should you consider the field?

By Jon Waterhouse | For the AJC

While some budding healthcare professionals find therapeutic services appealing, they aren't sure which way to go. Will it be physical, occupational or speech therapy?

In an effort to help those standing at the therapeutic crossroads, we gathered a panel of professionals in each field. They each reveal how they found themselves in their respective professions, how to get there, and what it takes to rise to the top.

### Physical therapy: Dr. Ingrid Anderson, owner Intown Physical Therapy

After becoming disenchanted with her career in business operations, Dr. Ingrid Anderson became drawn to the field of physical therapy. She had received therapy herself due to a running injury, and soon became fascinated with the profession.

Since Anderson had a BFA, she needed to go back to school for a year for prerequisite science course before sinking her teeth into physical therapy school.

After receiving her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from Georgia State University in 2010, she then completed the Mercer Orthopaedic Residency program in 2011 and received her Orthopaedic Clinical Specialist in 2012.

In order to zero in on a specialty, Dr. Anderson did an extra year of residency. This included more than 100 hours of self-directed study in neuroanatomy and neurodynamics.

"If you want to work in more competitive areas like

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Dr. Ingrid Anderson puts Jennifer McGuffey in a Redcord apparatus that is used to treat Musculoskeletal pain at Intown Physical Therapy In Atlanta. PHIL SKINNER / AJC



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neuro rehab or pediatric orthopaedics, the residency isn't required but highly recommended," she said.

Chalking up a degree isn't all it takes, Dr. Anderson explained. To succeed at a career in physical therapy, you need several character traits.

"You have to have a great deal of empathy," she explained, "and you really need to be able to put yourself in the patient's shoes."

Another essential quality of a physical therapist, she says, includes the ability to teach. Explaining an injury and schooling a patient on how to overcome it is key.

"At the same time, you also have to be good at pushing and motivating a patient," she said. "You not only need to be able to explain the therapeutic process, but you need to be able to motivate."

The final essential trait, she adds, is an insatiable thirst for knowledge. In her opinion, the best physical therapists don't simply rest on their laurels and repeat the same old interventions or tests.

They need the desire to continue studying on their own, and exploring new evidence and cutting-edge treatments.

Dr. Anderson operates her own private practice under the philosophy of tackling the problem head on without dragging things out. Although she works with some patients who have long-term issues and others who may need time to regain their strength, her goal is to quickly identify the issue and take care of it as swiftly as possible.

"If we don't have a clear direction in the first few sessions, or if we haven't made great strides in getting better, I'm going to refer somebody out," she said. "We should know really quickly what we're dealing with and how long it will take."

She says she found several advantages to having a private practice. These include the clinical freedom to treat people as she chooses and the flexibility to serve a wider range of patients. Making your own hours, she says, helps, too.

"I can work whatever 80 hours a week I want to work," she said with a laugh.

Dr. Anderson typically sees about 10 patients each day. She doesn't utilize lots of exercise equipment, and instead opts for corrective exercises us-

ing body weight, slings and bands. She then gives each patient a list of exercises to use at home.

At the end of the day, however, the most fulfilling part of her profession lies in the results.

"I see a lot of people come in here hopeless," she said. "And being able to give them the hope that they'll be able to get back to doing what they want and need to do is definitely the most rewarding part of my job."

### Speech therapy: Kim Ritger, owner Intown Atlanta Speech Therapy

According to Kim Ritger, the ability to speak remains the core of what makes us human.

"I felt like giving people the gift of speech," she said, "whether it's something they have never had or something that was taken away from them, is giving them the ability to communicate and connect with people."

It was that allure that detoured Ritger from a major in special education. Instead she opted to pursue undergraduate and master's degrees in speech pathology.

After graduation, Ritger worked in both school system and hospital environments. While working at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston Hospital, Ritger worked with in-patient acute care. She dealt with the sickest of the sick. Although it proved to be a high-stress situation, Ritger says she loved it. Each day was different, and she had the opportunity to work closely with doctors and other medical professionals.

After having her second child, Ritger chose to leave Egleston. Yet being a speech therapist meant she had the opportunity to reinvent herself once again.

"One of the great things about my field is you can work within your field," she explained. "You can change what you do, and you're qualified to work anywhere."

In 2012, Ritger opened her own pediatric practice, Intown Atlanta Speech Therapy. "The advantage to working in this setting for me is you get real close to these children and their families, and you get to work one-on-one with them," she said. "Because I opened my practice in my neighborhood, I mostly treat my neighbors and my children's classmates. My whole goal was to create this neighborhood speech therapy environment and to provide

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# The personal side

Fitness-focused entrepreneurs make a connection.

By Jon Waterhouse  
For the AJC

The lightning bolt of pain shooting across her shoulder meant trouble. Not only could a serious injury sideline Delaine Ross from her exercise regimen, but it could be bad for business. Ross owns Condition Kettlebell Gym in Atlanta.

While performing an exercise using a 70 pound kettlebell, an old-school piece of equipment resembling a cannonball with a handle, Ross made a wrong move. For the next eight months, she couldn't lift more than 35 pounds above her head.

By chance Dr. Ingrid Anderson, owner of Intown Physical Therapy, reached out to Ross through the gym website. Ross invited Dr. Anderson to a networking event, and afterward the pair chatted over coffee.

Ross told Dr. Anderson all about her gym and her passion for kettlebells. Years earlier while training for professional fitness competitions, Ross discovered the art of kettlebells. This form of exercise dates back to the 1600s and was developed by the Russian special forces. After reducing her workout to 45 minutes per day, three days a week and snagging better results, Ross was hooked.

She became a certified trainer in 2006 and opened Condition Kettlebell Gym in Atlanta in 2007. Ross and her team of instructors work with students on the gym's padded floor. They swing kettlebells, press them overhead and perform other time-tested exercises.

During the conversation, Ross realized she and Dr. Anderson shared similar philosophies, including the idea that surgery should be a last resort.

"I noticed that she was someone who sincerely wants to help people and just doesn't want to make mon-



Delaine Ross, owner of Condition Kettlebell Gym in Atlanta, demonstrates a typical workout. PHIL SKINNER / AJC

ey," Ross said.

So Ross decided it was time to take care of her shoulder injury. After Dr. Anderson examined Ross, she determined Ross was a candidate for trigger point dry needling. The process includes a fine acupuncture needle being inserted into various trigger points around the affected area. It elicits a twitch response and causes the muscles to contract.

Ross says Dr. Anderson described like this: When you have an injury, your body does everything it can to protect itself. You then make compensatory movement in order to protect the injured part. Sometimes the injury might heal, but all of the muscles around it aren't doing what they're normally supposed to do. So when the needle goes in, it releases all of those muscles.

"You can feel [the muscles] around the trigger point release," Ross described. "Then it's tingly and stays sore for about 24 hours."

After three sessions and performing some recommended exercises at home, Ross says the pain was gone. She soon jumped right back into her exercise routine and worked on gaining her strength back.

Today when injured athletes walk into Condition Kettlebell Gym, Ross knows where to send them.

"Runners and other endurance athletes often come in complaining of injuries," Ross said, "and I send them to Ingrid first."

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this service that my neighbors needed and wanted. It worked out really well for me.”

To thrive in the profession, Ritger says you need a great deal of patience, especially when focusing on pediatrics. Receiving a serious diagnosis such as autism can be traumatic for the parents. This can result in a great deal of frustration and anger, and you have to be able to handle that, she says.

“You have to kind of take on a role as a counselor supporting them through this time of crisis,” she said. “You have to be sensitive to that. You have to understand what these families are going through.”

### Occupational therapy: Valencia McCoy, Emory University Hospital Midtown

While physical therapy focuses on a patient regaining gross motor skills, including standing and walking, occupational therapy takes another step.

“With OT, we actually have the opportunity to look at the activities of daily living and the function of people’s lives,” explained Valencia McCoy, who works in the hospital’s rehabilitation therapy program. “We work at allowing people to participate in life skills on a day-to-day basis.”

This could include a stroke victim learning the best way to bathe or a paraplegic adapting to a new way of getting dressed.

Occupational therapy also can involve working with everything from visual motor and cognitive skills to fine motor skills.

To enter the field, prospects must attain a master’s degree. A doctorate in occupational therapy is also offered. It is, however, highly competitive, according to McCoy. Although occupational therapy continues to be a popular field, only a limited amount of schools offer OT degrees.

Of course it all begins with an undergraduate degree. McCoy suggests students begin with a background in biology, chemistry or another related science. Once in an OT program, that student will be better prepared for higher level classes such as gross anatomy and neurology.

Working in occupational therapy runs the patient gamut from neonatal to the elderly.

“It’s an unselfish and very giving job,” McCoy said. “You have to have



Dr. Ingrid Anderson treats Fred Willard at Intown Physical Therapy in Atlanta. PHIL SKINNER / AJC

**‘You have to have a great deal of empathy and you really need to be able to put yourself in the patient’s shoes.’**

**Dr. Ingrid Anderson**, Owner Intown Physical Therapy

the compassion to listen, to care and the willingness to work one-on-one with a patient.”

McCoy explains that occupational therapists straddle the line of psychology and have to be aware of the psychosis of each patient.

“Patients have to learn to deal with whatever diagnosis they have,” she said, “whether it’s a brain tumor, a stroke or a leg amputation. So you have to know how the body and mind come together to deal with that situation.”

## WHAT’S THE DIAGNOSIS?

### A LOOK AT WHAT EACH OF OUR EXPERTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE STATE OF THEIR THERAPEUTIC PROFESSIONS.

#### PHYSICAL THERAPY

##### Is the field growing?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the field of physical therapy will see a 36 percent growth through 2022.

##### Who’s hiring?

Dr. Anderson says the largest local employers continue to be hospitals. This includes specialty hospitals such as Shepherd Center. Corporate practices, like Select Physical Therapy and BenchMark, are big employers, too. Although Dr. Anderson prefers operating within her private practice, she reveals pay is often lower. “We get reimbursed less for the same work,” she said. “The pay is going to be less, so you really need to be passionate about it in order to be drawn to the practice setting.”

#### SPEECH THERAPY

##### Is the field growing?

“I see people going into the field all of the time,” Ritger said. “I have students calling my practice frequently wanting to come observe, talk to me about graduate school and learn about what’s it like being a speech therapist.”

##### Who’s hiring?

Ritger sees an increase in demand for speech therapists in school systems, because of the amount of students dealing with autism and other speech-related issues. “It seems like many therapists want to work at schools, because of the schedule,” she said. “Hospitals and other medical facilities all have speech therapists on staff. And then there’s a lot of private clinics all over the city that have them. Open jobs pop up all over the place.”

#### OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

##### Is the field growing?

“Occupational therapy may be a profession that’s often overlooked (by the public), but it’s in high demand,” McCoy said.

##### Who’s hiring?

McCoy adds she constantly sees jobs available everywhere from acute rehabilitation facilities to traveling contract therapy scenarios. “There’s also continuous high demand for OT in schools, because of the rise in learning disabilities and autism,” she said.

##### Where to look?

Start your search online. Websites including [www.therapistsunlimited.com](http://www.therapistsunlimited.com) can point therapists in the right direction.

— Jon Waterhouse, For the AJC