

Margaret Pollard: Early Experiences of being a C.A.R.S. Physiotherapist in 1953-4

On Nov 3, 2015, at 12:02 AM, Margaret Pollard wrote:

I am enclosing a memoir of my early experiences of being a C.A.R.S. physiotherapist in 1953-4.

In December 1952, I emigrated from London, UK, after responding to an advertisement in the British, Physiotherapy Journal for physiotherapists needed by C.A.R.S., BC, for a minimum, 2-year commitment. My colleague and I were both accepted after submitting our applications and passing brief, medical tests at Canada House.

We received tickets to travel by ship from Southampton to Halifax, and train tickets with meal vouchers from Halifax to Vancouver. It was the adventure of a lifetime! In Vancouver we were met at the CPR train station by the smartly uniformed, head physiotherapist for C.A.R.S., Ruth Fortune. Later she introduced us to Mary Pack who was the original founder of the organization then in it's infancy. There were to be 3 months of orientation in Vancouver before being posted to some community in BC and developing a C.A.R.S. Treatment Centre.

During the orientation period I had to pass a driving test as the units were mobile, and a vehicle would be provided. I was measured for a tailor-made, air-force blue uniform with the C.A.R.S. crest on the pocket, and tam to wear at a jaunty angle. Trained, C.A.R.S. physiotherapists let me practice driving skills in their small Austins en route to home visits for some patients.

I gathered experience observing treatment programs for arthritics in Vancouver General and St. Paul's Hospitals. Sometimes I worked in the hydrotherapy pool at G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre. I also accompanied a physiotherapist on home visiting, and eventually treated some patients. There were opportunities to observe rheumatologist's clinics and learn more about splinting from an OT.

In April 1953 I was sent to Port Alberni in order to establish a C.A.R.S. clinic, and set up once weekly clinics in Parksville, Qualicum and Courtenay later.

It was quite a responsibility for a 23-year-old who had only graduated from St. Mary's School of Physiotherapy in London 2 years earlier. My working base would be a 6-bed department with adjoining office in the 2-year-old, West Coast General Hospital. The only equipment was one infrared lamp, but a few more supplies were sent later.

After a month there was a message to collect my car at the CPR docks in Nanaimo. My landlady suggested that her boy friend, Bill, would help me drive back to Port Alberni via

the twisting road by Cameron Lake and the hilly route over "the Hump" down to the Alberni Valley below. So, I travelled by bus with Bill to assist on the homeward drive.

It was a shock to see the new vehicle at the docks, as I expected to drive a small Austin or similar car, which I had used in Vancouver. Instead it was a brand-new, cream, Chevrolet station wagon with the black, C.A.R.S. logo and bluebirds painted each side! I had never ridden in a station wagon let alone drive one.

While my C.A.R.S. counterpart in Nanaimo and I went off for lunch, Bill said he was meeting friends, and we agreed to meet in 2 hours' time. Alas, on return we noticed that Bill had been drinking, and in no way was I travelling with him in the new car. While my friend disconnected the battery terminal unobserved, I told Bill that the car would need servicing for starting problems, and I paid for his bus fare home. So, the next day I returned safely alone, but it was scary ride as I managed the large, standard car on narrow roads.

There was much to organise in setting up the clinic. Doctor's referrals were required for physiotherapy treatments, so it was necessary that they be aware of the general, C.A.R.S. program, and treatments available. A local women's auxiliary was established to help with transportation of patients. Often, I had referrals for in-patients, as I was the first physiotherapist to be working in the hospital. Work increased when there was a polio epidemic in the Valley in 1953, a year before the Salk vaccine was available. There were periodic workshops for C.A.R.S. PT's and O.T.'s in Vancouver. These were stimulating affairs with the exchange of information.

For recreation I joined an active, hiking group and the local, tennis club. It was there I met my future husband, and we were married in the Fall of 1954.

The hospital clinic was functioning well, and the planned clinics were set up in the Courthouse in Courtenay, the Village Hall in Qualicum and in a private home in Parksville. However, we were expecting our first child and it was time for me to take leave from physiotherapy for some years. My introduction to life in Canada was a rewarding experience.

I hope that my memoir will provide some insight for historical interest in the archives.

Yours truly, Margaret Pollard