

Jean Friesen (née Killey) Physiotherapy Career 1963 – 2005

Graduating from the Liverpool School of Physiotherapy in 1963, I began my working career at the Walton Hospital in Liverpool.

In 1964 I went to Switzerland and worked in the Zurich Canton Hospital (Cantonspittal). I was first working in the women's mud pack room. We slathered buckets of hot mud all over the patients, and wrapped them up in sheets like mummies, left them for an hour before they went into showers to clean off.

Next, I went to the bath department where we soaked patients in warm baths with a variety of herbs sprinkled in the water. We also gave them massages with a jet spray of warm water. Finally, when my German had improved enough, I was moved in the men's gym. Here, every patient had one hour's treatment. A bell rang on the hour. I would sometimes have to exercise one broken finger for an hour, no English speaking allowed. Other patients I had to get changed, into the pool for exercises, then dried and dressed all in the one allocated hour.

Many wealthy patients used the physio department as a health spa and travelled to different European cities, staying in 5-star hotels and coming to the physio department for their spa treatments. One year of this sort of physio was more than enough for me!

After I returned to Britain in 1965, I worked at The Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford for eighteen months until I emigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia in May of 1967.

I worked at the Vancouver General Hospital until the end of 1968 and during that time worked on Wards B3 & B5 in the Heather Pavilion. B3 & B5 were for those men with no health insurance, from Skid Row. Unlike other wards, these poor souls were left to go through their DT's without the small amount of alcohol provided to alcoholics who had insurance. They would spit and swear at me, it was so sad to see their agony and the language totally shocked me. In England, swearing tended to be blasphemous. In Canada it was sexual. I was 24 years old and was unused to that and had never heard this sort language before. When I requested help to do their chest physiotherapy, Pam Jeacocke, my supervisor would arrive. I was so embarrassed and would blush beet red, but she never turned a hair!

The Hospital was a revolving door for them. They came, poorly nourished and with pneumonia from living on the streets in all weather. Once treated, off they went, only to arrive back a few months later with another bout of pneumonia. Once through their DT's, they were some of the nicest guys I can remember. Some were professional men, well educated but who had fallen on hard times and I became very fond of some of them.

At the end of 1968 I began work at Burnaby General Hospital. I was, by this time, married and decided that I did not want the horrible rotating weekend duties that all staff physiotherapists had to do at VGH.

Burnaby General had a small Department, about 5 physios, I think. Eleanor Vourinen was head physio, she was lovely girl and we all helped one another and became close buddies. Eleanor subsequently interviewed Karen Bretherton for a job at Burnaby. Karen had been in the set above me in Liverpool.

I had my first child in November 1970 but was able to carry on doing evening shifts at Burnaby General until the summer of 1972 when I had my second child.

I took a break from my physiotherapy career for the next five years until I did the Re Entry program with Ruth Fortune. After the 'retread' training, I joined Karen Bretherton, now running her own Private Practice in Port Moody and worked there for 17 years. During those years I also worked for Shirley Lecker at the Lynn Valley and Inglewood Care Centres.

I also worked for Susan Shoemith who had left Burnaby General Hospital to open her Private Practice just before I had started work there. Susan's clinic was on the corner of Royal Oak and Kingsway. We treated prisoners from Okalla Prison Farm who arrived in the custody of Sheriffs, who sat outside the curtained areas. They were mostly guys who were in prison for 3rd drunk driving offences and some were delighted with the good food and better living conditions than they usually had. One was taking a computer course which he would have been unable to afford to take on his own. He was provided with a computer and was allowed out to go to the training school. He had rented out his apartment and also got money for that in addition to what he earned in prison. It annoyed me as it didn't seem like much of a deterrent to drunk driving!

Early on, I also worked for CARS for some time, in the North Vancouver clinic. I really enjoyed the organization of that company.

In my later years I left Inglewood but carried on working at the Lynn Valley Care Centre and also at the Royal Ascot Care Centre until my retirement in 2005.