



# A day in the life of...

## Meet Helen Veal

Advanced Orthoptist and Stroke Lead,  
Maidstone Hospital



There is always opportunity to progress or evolve your career with MTW. My role has naturally evolved over the years and the orthoptic team has been very supportive throughout that time.

I trained at Coventry School of Orthoptics, qualifying in 1993 and started working at Maidstone soon after. I completed my Distance Learning Post Graduate Diploma in Orthoptics through Sheffield University, and this was supported by my Head of Department.

Over the years my role has evolved and I am now the Stroke Lead Orthoptist for MTW. As stroke lead for the orthoptic team, I regularly attend our professional body's stroke meetings and we are supported to complete CPD and attend meetings. With a growing family there has been the flexibility to alter my working patterns giving me a good work/home balance.

There are opportunities to increase your knowledge of orthoptics through preceptorships, peer reviews, journal clubs, and also from the wide-ranging experience of the team here, from long-standing members of staff, full and part-time and new graduates. You can also look at extended roles as you progress through your career. We take orthoptic students on placement so there is the opportunity to be involved in teaching too.

In my role as the stroke lead, I oversee any stroke related orthoptic input and queries, including training of MDT members and orthoptic staff who assess stroke patients. I have input into the stroke development programme at ISDN level aiming to ensure recognition of the value of orthoptic input to the stroke patients and promote equal access to orthoptic services across the Kent and Medway region. I audit the stroke referrals on an annual basis and feedback on any service improvements. We are currently looking to secure a visual field machine for the unit as part of the new HASU/ASU stroke unit development.

No two days of my week are the same. I work four days and split my time between the outpatients setting of the orthoptic department and inpatient setting of the acute stroke unit.

Monday mornings and Friday afternoons are the outpatient clinic for stroke patients which are a mix of face to face and telephone consultations, new and follow up patients. Monday afternoon is administration. During this time I write clinic letters and contact different professionals in support of patients' ongoing treatment. I also prepare lectures for other members of the stroke team and keep up to date on guidelines for stroke in general and specifically from orthoptics.

On Tuesdays and Friday mornings, I attend the stroke unit assessing inpatients that have been noted to have vision deficits following their stroke and feeding back my results to the team.

On Wednesdays I work in the orthoptic department assessing patients for the joint paediatric and adult motility clinics, conducting routine orthoptic assessments ahead of the patients seeing the ophthalmology team.

I like the variability of my role and the mix of seeing inpatients and outpatients. Patient contact has always been a very important part for me. I am passionate about increasing awareness of the benefits orthoptic input can bring to stroke patients. I enjoy the challenge of seeing complex patients and explaining their visual defects to the patients and the team around them including their carers.