Working in Private Practice in Physiotherapy?

To become a Physiotherapist, and graduate from a physiotherapy course, requires a lot of hard work, sweat and tears. The moment it is all over should come as a relief. The problem is once you graduate you are faced with some ever bigger questions about what comes next?

No longer are you being told where to go and when, you now have to make a decision that will affect the rest of your physiotherapy career and your life. One of these difficult decisions is whether to work in the public or private field?

In most undergraduate courses there is limited contact to the private sector and some may be unsure if a graduate can go straight into a private practice?

The answer is yes. Especially if that is the direction you want to go in your future career. There are numerous examples of physiotherapy graduates going straight into a private practice, and enjoying a long and rewarding career, as there are also examples of individuals who have started in the public sector who have then moved across.

The decision you make now is not set in stone. Physiotherapy is the kind of profession that allows you to evolve. It can take you a multitude of different directions whether you go public or private.

The diversity of private practice jobs is substantial, so it is important to consider what is important to you in your life and your career. How much you earn, the type of facilities and patients you work with, the educational, and career path opportunities you have, and the support and/or mentoring you may receive are all very important considerations.

TYPE OF CLINIC
There is a variety of Private Physiotherapy Clinics, and there are advantages and dis-advantages of working in both. Smaller Clinics may provide a different environment to larger clinics, as will working as part of a Network of practices. It is important to think about the support that you will receive, the differences in environment, the facilities such as; treatment areas, Hydrotherapy Pools, Pilates Studios, opportunities to work with particular patient groups such as sports teams, womens health, inpatients and more.

HOW MUCH WILL I EARN?
An important question all new graduates need to consider is how they will earn. The types of remuneration can vary from a fixed income, to a percentage of the amount you charge your patients, to a combination of the two. It is important that when taking a job you know the difference. A fixed income may sound appealing initially, having a guaranteed income each month but there in no reward for effort. The harder you work does not affect how much you earn (Eg $3500 a month). The other side of the coin is being paid a percentage of revenue. For example if you generate $10,000 of revenue in a month and are on a percentage of 35%, you will be paid $3,500 and if you generate $20,000 you will be paid $7000 that month. There can however be problem in this method when you have a slow month and generate $5000 you will only earn $1,750.

You should also be aware of the different awards for Physiotherapists, as well as the different forms of employment or contracting that are available. The newly introduced Health Professionals Support Services Award is now in place, and is different to the award used in the Public sector. Whilst Employment can be a good way of working within a Practice, there are other forms of agreement and contracts that provide greater flexibility, depending on the arrangements at that clinic.

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ONGOING EDUCATION
Proof of ongoing education is now a requirement of being registered, and thus being able to practice, as a Physiotherapist in Australia. A major fear of many graduates is the level of education and professional development available to you if you go into the private sector.

The amount of professional development is limited only by your time and imagination. Many Practices have well established Education and mentoring programmes, some more formal and structured than others. The APA special interest groups, and Sports Medicine Australia provide some courses, and there is a growing number of private courses available.

When choosing a place to work, you should also find out if any education is provided. You should also find out if you will have mentoring or access to experienced clinicians.

INSURANCE
It is now a requirement of being registered as a Physiotherapist in Australia, that you have professional indemnity insurance. You should also consider income protection insurance, and good Private health cover to protect yourself should you be injured, and be unable to work.

CAREER PATH
One of the most important things you need to know is whether there is an opportunity to grow your career. Moving into the private sector can mean you take your career wherever you want it to go. This can be into management/ ownership, higher level sporting teams, or even teaching. It is important to distinguish if the job you take can give you the opportunity to grow the way you want.

In summary, if as a graduate you want to move into the private sector you can with confidence. Before taking a job however you need to find out if you will have the resources available that will fulfil your learning and professional development. Not all private practices are the same and your overall job satisfaction will depend on whether you have reward for effort, support and an opportunity to grow.