

Interview a Health Professional
Mackenzie Chrimes

Name: Dr. William Adkins

Position: Physical Therapist at Salem VA Medical Center

Education: Bachelor's of Science in Athletic Training, Doctorate in Physical Therapy

Q1, What inspired you to get into Physical therapy and Athletic Training?:

In High School, he injured his ACL and ended up having to have a total reconstruction procedure. During rehab after his surgery, the school he attended had no Athletic Trainers to maintain his recovery process, so he didn't really know what Athletic Trainers were. He had an amazing experience in physical therapy, where his therapist taught him about Athletic Training. Since he was already interested in physical therapy, it sparked his interest in pursuing a career in both.

Q2, What path did you take to get to your current job?:

Dr. Adkins attended ODU and got his Bachelor's of Science in Athletic Training in 2003. He then worked around Chesapeake as an Athletic Trainer for a few years. He helped students at Western Branch, Joliff, and Great Bridge while he was going through PT school at ODU.

Q3, What basic roles/responsibilities do you hold as a PT/AT?:

Daily roles and responsibilities include injury evaluation and treatment. He said that here lately he has been meeting with patients via telehealth (Zoom meetings and such) due to the circumstances of COVID. In addition to meeting with patients and actually working with patients to rehab, he also works with other health professionals to make sure that patients are getting the care they need. For example, he will often refer patients to other facilities if they require further help or care.

Q4, What is your favorite or most rewarding part of your job?:

According to Dr. Adkins, the most rewarding part of being a Physical Therapist is helping people, who thought that they would be living in an injured or debilitated state forever, get back to a basic or higher- functioning state. He said that at times, the stakes can be very high and it can be a very high-pressure circumstance. For example, he used to work at the Department of Justice at the DEA and FBI Academy as an Athletic Trainer and had to help rehab trainees who had been injured during their time there. It became very high stakes to get that trainee back to full health or at least able to go back to training, because if they didn't and weren't able to continue, they would be removed from the academy. He explained that as the most rewarding experiences in his career thus far.

Q5, What was the most surprising part of being a PT/AT?:

The most surprising thing to him was how all of the broken bones and often grotesque injuries become apart of your daily life and you just kind of get used to it. He said that in the beginning of his career he would be super cautious and aware of everything he did and if anything he did hurt a patient, but now he knows that it's part of the job and sometimes it will hurt them to get better. It also surprised Dr. Adkins how much pain the older generations could put up with compared to younger kids.

Q6, What was the most challenging aspect?:

According to Dr. Adkins, the most challenging part of being a physical therapist was having to deliver the bad news that sometimes patients will have to live with their injuries and that sometimes there isn't anything else they can do for them. For example, he had a patient who had cancer that metastasized in their shoulder which led to the patient having surgery that left them with no arm function. He said that in cases where the patient is left in a state like that, it never gets easier having to be the bearer of the bad news.

Q7, What advice would you give to someone entering the field?:

He advised that anyone entering the field and pursuing a career in Athletic Training or Physical Therapy should get involved, get active, and try to get some volunteer hour under your belt to see if you really like it and to get some early experience. He also said that no matter what career you are pursuing, you should always give 110% to your classes so that you have no regrets.

Post-Interview Reflection:

I found it really helpful and interesting to talk to a real professional who is currently pursuing a career in the field I hope to work in someday. Dr. Adkins was really friendly and had a lot of interesting stories to tell about his experiences as an Athletic Trainer and Physical Therapist. The thing that stood out to me the most was when he talked about how hard it can be to work with patients who could possibly not recover. As a healthcare provider, it is our job to help people get back to their "normal," though as he said sometimes they don't. This can be hard for us as well as the professionals, so it is essential to remind ourselves why we are doing this and why we love our careers. Additionally, Dr. Adkins emphasized that it is important to give your best effort all the time, which was very good advice for someone entering the Physical Therapy/Athletic Training field. This interview just intensified my want to become an Athletic Trainer and help people by preventing and treating injuries and I would love the chance to talk to more professionals possessing the same passion.