

Prosthetist / orthotist

Join the team and
make a difference

Prosthetists design and fit artificial replacements (prostheses) for people who have lost, or were born without, a limb. Their work makes it possible for people who might otherwise be incapacitated to lead a more active life. Orthotists design and fit a range of aids (orthoses) – such as braces, splints and footwear – to help patients overcome difficulties with movement, and to relieve discomfort.

What will you do?

As a **prosthetist**, you will assess the individual patient and design a replacement body part that will be safe, comfortable and functional. The process begins with making a plaster cast of the area on to which the prosthesis will fit. You then design a model of the new prosthesis and work with the technicians who produce it. Once it is ready you will fit the new prosthesis, make sure the patient is comfortable and happy and give advice on getting the best from it. You will also follow-up on how the patient is managing with their limb and make any changes as necessary.



As an **orthotist** you will be finding solutions for a wide range of patients. These include individually designed splints for children with cerebral palsy, braces for people with back problems or special shoes for arthritis sufferers. Treating people who attend your clinic, you will assess their

Where will you work?

You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:

- hospitals and outpatient clinics
- local health centres and other care settings
- people's own homes.

What skills and qualities will you need?

- a talent for understanding how things work and technical design
- good communication skills
- the ability to work as part of a team and relate easily to all sorts of people
- sensitivity to people's aspirations and dignity
- a responsible, professional approach, respecting patient confidentiality

needs, design the orthosis, check the result and then fit it for the patient and ensure they are happy with it. This will also include teaching the patient how to use it.

Prosthetists and orthotists usually work in clinics as part of a wider team including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, nurses and counsellors, as well as doctors. On occasion, you may make home visits to check on progress and investigate any problems that patients may be having. Use of computer modelling to aid the design process is an increasing feature of the work.

What entry routes are available?

To practise as a prosthetist or orthotist in the NHS you will need a BSc degree in prosthetics/orthotics that is recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC). The NHS provides financial support to eligible students on NHS-funded courses. For more information, visit www.nhspa.gov.uk/sgu

Once you have your degree, you will need to register with the HPC to practice as an prosthetist or orthotist.

With GCSEs or an equivalent NVQ and/or previous work experience it is often possible to start work as a trainee or assistant, combining on-the-job training with study so that you learn as you earn.

For more information, see the *clinical support worker* factsheet.

For more information on the range of opportunities available in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications. This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at www.jobs.nhs.uk

How can you develop your career?

As your clinical experience grows you can move into more senior roles, or become a specialist in a particular area such as the lower limb. There are opportunities to do research and teaching to develop the profession further.

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation, as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative please see the *Careers in the allied health professions* booklet.

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff in the NHS except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which prosthetists and orthotists may be paid: healthcare science practitioner (Band 5); healthcare science specialist (Band 6); healthcare science advanced (Band 7); healthcare science consultant (Band 8a-c). To find out more about pay bands, and to see the most up-to-date salary information, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits

Most prosthetists and orthotists are employed by private companies contracted to the NHS, and will negotiate their salary and conditions individually.

To find out more about careers in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to the allied health professions, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts