



CAREERS

Why I . . . play netball

Emergency paediatric and neonatal transport consultant Hazel Talbot tells **Adrian O’Dowd** how the sport has provided a great way to unwind and has boosted her health

Adrian O’Dowd

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Playing netball has reawakened a long dormant passion for Hazel Talbot who works as a consultant for the Yorkshire and Humber Infant and Children’s Transport Service, known as Embrace.

Talbot’s job involves working for a specialist, round-the-clock transport service for critically ill infants and children who need care in another hospital.

“It’s the best job in the world,” says Talbot. “We are the only truly integrated service in the UK and do both paediatric and neonatal intensive care transfers and repatriations. The team here is fabulous and we are all about quality improvement and making things better.”

The job is rewarding but can be intense. “It’s the most amazing job, unusual and really stressful,” she says. “We work really hard, but sometimes it doesn’t work. Sometimes children die.”

Talbot has found that playing a sport has helped her find a better balance at work. “As a consultant, it’s so easy to do twice as much work as you’re meant to, especially as there’s an expectation that you’ll do extra when asked,” Talbot says. “Now, netball is a good reason for me to say ‘No, I’m not doing that because I’m playing netball.’”

Talbot enjoyed playing the sport when she was at school and university, but work and having children meant it had faded from her life for many years.

“I had an 18 year gap between leaving university and playing again,” she explains. “My daughter was playing for a local club when she was about 10. I used to take her and sit on the bench itching to play.”

Talbot found her chance to do just that through a scheme run by England Netball called Back to Netball which is designed

to get women playing again (www.englandnetball.co.uk/backtonetball).

“I found a branch locally and went for it. Someone then recommended that I get in touch with the coach of the YMCA in Leeds. I turned up to one of their sessions and was asked to play for the seniors team. I absolutely loved it. I now also play for my local team, the Weatherby Angels, which is made up of people of different ages.”

To allow her to train for netball, Talbot discussed working arrangements with her colleagues, explaining that she would continue to work her fair share but, ideally, would like not to be on call on a Thursday. “I haven’t had to cut back on my work, just organise it in a different way,” she says.

She is convinced that the sport has helped improve her health and wellbeing. “What it’s done for me is give me a focus,” she says. “I was in my 40s and, being a doctor, I was a little paranoid about having a heart attack. I also worried about not being healthy for my children and not being a good example for them.

“Netball has given me the push to be healthier and fitter. It is a complete de-stressor as well—I don’t think about anything else when I’m doing it.”

How to make the change

- Know your goal—exercise, better health, social interaction, stress relief
- Make sure everyone at home is on board—ensure your partner can look after the children or pets
- Remember you have to recover from the sport and be fit enough to work
- Be patient—try a few activities or sports clubs to find the right thing
- Speak to work colleagues to discuss your plans and agree how to accommodate them