

Overview of Physiotherapy Profession

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:  February 19, 2025

Published:  February 26, 2025

Citation: Rusizana Leopold. Overview of Physiotherapy Profession. Biomed J Sci & Tech Res 60(5)-2025. BJSTR. MS.ID.009503.

ABSTRACT

The healthcare community, the medical academia, and members of the public see physiotherapy professionals in the health sector and public places where patients, groups in sports, and working classes gather. However, the roles of physiotherapy are not clear to many. This paper aims to present the physiotherapy profession and roles of physiotherapy professionals. Physiotherapy as a growing profession with services extended to all age groups with different health problems complements other healthcare disciplines to serve patients with various conditions that impact their level of function; enhance recovery, and prevent the impact of ill-health on the patient and his/her family. The practice of physiotherapy requires a systematic patient assessment, developing an intervention plan based on the findings of the assessment, maintaining records, and ensuring patient safety during patient care. Physiotherapy research has recently improved to advancements in scientific knowledge acquisition; members of the physiotherapy profession should include research as a core role of the profession. The current and future complex disease burden and the public impulse for quality healthcare services create opportunities for physiotherapy professionals to rigorously embrace evidence-based physiotherapy. University faculties that offer physiotherapy courses should include physiotherapy health promotion and patient safety in their curricula.

Keywords: Physiotherapy; Assessment; Intervention; Research; Evidence-Based Physiotherapy

Abbreviations: EBP: Evidence-Based Physiotherapy

Key points

1. There is an increased number of patients with chronic, occupational, and lifestyle-related conditions seeking physiotherapy.
2. Healthcare providers continue to inquire about physiotherapy roles in the health service sector.
3. Physiotherapy patient assessment is both a facilitator and catalyst to positive healthy outcomes.
4. Physiotherapy research and evidence-based physiotherapy are key to ensuring the quality and consistency of physiotherapy care.

Introduction

Globally, physiotherapy is a recognized profession and is an essential member of the modern healthcare service sector. Physiotherapy is identified in the management of conditions in their acute, subacute, and chronic states, and prevention of illnesses and injuries. Historically, physiotherapy grew from the practice of aspects of soft tissue manipulative procedures, and gymnastic exercises to a more organized profession with a wider area of practice in most of the nations. The physiotherapy profession is therapy (treatment) for the preservation, enhancement, or restoration of movement and physical function impaired or threatened by disease, injury, or disability using

therapeutic exercise, physical modalities (for example electrotherapy), assistive devices, and patient education and training [1]. Physiotherapy is important in the management and prevention of health problems, improving the general quality of life of an individual patient and public health [2]. The World Physiotherapy is a global voice of the physiotherapy profession and the practice of physiotherapy requires one to obtain a license for practice from the state-recognized board of the country in which he/she works. Physiotherapy can be done in both outpatient and inpatient settings for example in hospitals, rehabilitative care centers, and homes, but also in offices or workplaces and in sports areas. The rising wages paid for healthcare, the phys-

iotherapy professionals' shortage, the expanding number of elderly populations, and the increasing factors contributing to ill health have made physiotherapy care institutions transform to respond to the concerns.

Physiotherapy Professionals

Physiotherapy professionals work across the health care systems such as in hospitals, schools, private clinics, sports, home care, long-term care facilities, and public settings. Trained physiotherapy professionals actively participate in patients' assessments, establish diagnoses, develop and implement intervention plans, and advise patients and family members on adherence to care for better outcomes. They work with individuals of all ages facing health and functional problems or are threatened by ill health which would impact their functional abilities. Physiotherapy professionals educate patients and caregivers about preventing and dealing with chronic disease and utilize group-based programmes by focusing on preventing and managing chronic conditions and on promoting health and wellness [3]. Physiotherapy professional communities have intensely increased the marketing of physiotherapy services, this replicates a rapidly expanding workforce allowing the public to directly access physiotherapy without the need for medical referral [4]. Physiotherapy professionals should collaborate with other healthcare professionals to dismantle professional hierarchies, [5] as a way of expanding its wider roles of patient care. Physiotherapy professionals are well positioned to address the Sustainable Development Goals which are among others; reducing child mortality rates, and improving maternal health and other chronic diseases of lifestyle [6].

Core Roles of Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy Patient Assessment

In healthcare, patient assessment is vital for the selection of setting goals, selecting intervention strategies, prognosis, and evaluation of the progression achieved toward the treatment goals; for instance, the assessor wants to assess the patient's perceptions of how the disease process, activity, and disability interfere with their life situation [7]. The physiotherapy care process necessitates systematic patient assessment, diagnosis, and prognosis, developing as well as implementing intervention plans and patient re-assessment. Physiotherapy patient assessment begins by obtaining and documenting individual demographic data. Patients' demographic data has been determined to affect their health status and forms the basis from which certain chronic disease prevalences vary [8]. Individual patient demographic data mainly includes; name, gender, date of birth, marital status, height/weight, occupation contact, address, and income status. Initial encounters with patients and clients must include asking about the patient's medical history whereas subsequent visits may only require a review of the medical history and an update with any changes. Obtaining the medical history of the patient is an essential part that guides caregivers toward appropriate, effective, and safe patient care.

Information gathered by doing a thorough medical history can have life-or-death consequences.

A complete medical history includes in-depth inquiry into the patient's medical issues such as all diseases and illnesses currently being treated and their residual effects. Obtaining a medical history from the patient helps understand the state of health of the patient. Surgical history should include all invasive procedures the patient underwent while family history links any relationships of disease to genetic predispositions and social history establishes personal behaviors, occupation, spiritual and sexual or relationships. The history acts as a form of tool that relates to any acute complaints and directs toward a diagnosis [9]. Information obtained from the patient's history serves to prevent potential harm to the patient during treatment such as recognition of contraindications of certain interventions. History obtained during patient assessment creates a window for patient physical examination. Physical examination includes various clinical tests to investigate joint movement, muscle strength, length, and movement control moreover patients complain of pain, impaired activity, and other patient functional aspects. Poor physical exam skills are a noteworthy threat to patient safety as they can lead to incorrect as well as missed diagnoses. If a physical examination is not performed or is poorly done, patient safety is threatened and diagnostic errors are likely, [10] therefore a careful examination can help a physiotherapy professional develop an intervention plan that accurately responds to patient problems. Physiotherapy professionals use information obtained during patient assessment for developing an intervention plan to promote the ability to function, reduce pain, maintain or restore function and prevent disability.

Physiotherapy Interventions (Patient Care)

Physiotherapy interventions are a pillar in the physiotherapy-patient care process. Determining interventions depends entirely on findings from physiotherapy patient assessment. Physiotherapy professionals are embedded in supervising patients' progress and making adjustments for intervention (treatment) plans as needed, helping patients to maintain or restore flexibility, strength, and range of motion [11]. The interventions (treatments) in physiotherapy include; therapeutic exercises, functional training in self-care and home management, functional training in work, community, and leisure, manual therapy, prescription and application of appropriate assistive devices, electrotherapy and mechanical modalities, patient instruction, coordination, and documentation [12]. Physiotherapy professionals provide care for people of all ages and in a variety of settings, including hospitals, private practices, outpatient clinics, rehabilitation centres, home health agencies, schools, sports, and fitness facilities, places of work, and nursing homes.

Health Promotion

The global health resources continue to shrink in relation to population growth and this creates a vital need for and value of the health

promotion and disease prevention approach in health services. Presently, health promotion is very relevant and ought to also embrace approaches to promote health in specific settings such as schools, hospitals, workplaces, residential areas, and among groups of people [13]. Whereas health promotion received an impetus following the Alma Ata declaration, it needs to be built into all the policies and once applied proficiently will lead to positive health outcomes. Addressing health promotion issues can be effective through adopting a holistic approach of empowering people and their communities to act for the good of their health. Physiotherapy professionals come across patients with chronic conditions and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors [14]. They are therefore well suited to promote health and wellness for their patients and families who maintain contact with them. Health promotion should be developed, reviewed, and included in undergraduate physiotherapy curricula and contain effective approaches to reduce and control modern-day preventable diseases and situations leading to ill health.

Research

The purpose of research is to enhance society by advancing knowledge through scientific theories, concepts, and ideas. The rising disease burden, increase research in physiotherapy, and evidence-based practice have led to more physiotherapy professionals being involved in research. Views offer engagement in research right from leaders and physiotherapists, participating in a research project is beneficial for institutions, individual physiotherapy professionals, and the patients [15]. Substantial prerequisites to participating in research among physiotherapy professionals that exist are; clinical applicability, support, sufficient time and initial contribution of leaders. Research has high value to society, it may provide vital evidence about disease trends and risk factors, outcomes of care interventions, functional abilities, patterns of care, and health care costs and use. Conditions to support physiotherapy professionals' use of research exist at individual, workplace as well as extra-organizational levels [16]. Physiotherapy professionals should therefore close the gap of the scarcity of research in some areas of physiotherapy.

Evidence-Based Physiotherapy

The emergence of evidence-based practice (EBP) movements in the 1990s created high prominence for a more research-informed physiotherapy practice hence need for a more research-informed physiotherapy practice was recognized for decades. Quality of care can be driven and achieved by evidence-based physiotherapy. The expanding workforce of the physiotherapy profession should tailor mainly to quality evidence-based physiotherapy services if it has to maintain the expansion and growing number of patients (or clients) seeking quality care. The European region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy defined EBP as a commitment to use the best available evidence to inform decision-making about the care of individuals that involves integrating physiotherapist practitioners and

individual professional judgement with evidence gained through systematic research [17]. The physiotherapy profession embraces quality patient care through Evidence-Based Physiotherapy (EBP); it is an emerging and increasing theme in rehabilitation and physiotherapy [18]. Evidence-based physiotherapy includes research, clinical practice, and the values of patients and clients; it is an important factor in determining the quality of physiotherapy care. The approaches to achieve a more EBP have largely targeted individual healthcare professionals to affect their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills as a means of changing clinical practice [19]. Physiotherapy professionals fulfill several healthcare roles in a collaborative inter-professional team and the community through an evidenced-informed approach to care, they should therefore appreciate evidence-based physiotherapy.

Physiotherapy Practice and Patient Safety

Safety is a primary concern in any activity involving risks. Although it was not part of the original Hippocratic Oath, patient safety is a fundamental principle of health care derived from the Latin *non nocere* (do no harm) it is deeply embedded in the medical profession. The axiom 'do no harm' lies in the centre of patient safety which is defined by the World Health Organisation as a framework of organized activities that create culture, processes, procedures, behaviors, technology, and environments in health [20]. Unsafe care remains one of the top ten causes of death and disability globally. The recent findings reveal that each year; unsafe hospital-based care causes 134 million adverse events and claims 2.6 million deaths in low- and middle-income countries [21]. The idea of ensuring patient safety is less developed in physiotherapy than in other areas of health care. Physiotherapy is among other professions where patient safety is emerging, error perception and recognition are lacking, and analyzing errors tends to focus on individual blame rather than on the components of the process leading up to errors. Physiotherapy is services provided to develop, maintain and restore maximum movement and functional ability throughout the lifespan, including services where movement and function are threatened by aging, injury, pain, diseases, disorders, conditions and/or environmental factors. The retained perception that standard physiotherapy interventions cause little harm seriously hinders the detection, reporting and documenting of involved risks and analysis for prevention [22]. As a common practice, in healthcare settings patient safety programs must include physiotherapy professionals along with other healthcare providers during in-service induction trainings, and patient safety training should be appreciated in university physiotherapy courses.

Conclusion

In the healthcare sector, physiotherapy is important in enhancing patients' recovery from illnesses, restoring and maintaining function and preventing diseases in all age groups. The physiotherapy professionals are observing increased access to their services by members of the public presenting with health problems brought about by rising

technology use, injuries, increase in lifestyle-related diseases, and the effects of poverty and malnutrition. The physiotherapy workforce up-scale to heighten accessibility require quality training, education, and research. The Ugandan education sector has made a significant contribution to raising a workforce to strengthen the health service sector. The physiotherapy workforce and the physiotherapy education department should strive to observe the core roles of the physiotherapy profession, health promotion, embrace research, evidence-based physiotherapy, and patient safety.

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ISSN: 2574-1241

DOI: 10.26717/BJSTR.2025.60.009503

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