

Physical Therapy Awareness Among Health Care Professionals: Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Physical therapists (PT) are health care professionals, who helps to improve patient's health status and optimum functioning to have better quality of life. PT plays a vital role in health care settings and known as dynamic provider of rehabilitation services. The objective of this study was to determine the awareness of physical therapy practice among health care professionals. A cross sectional study conducted in different hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Non-probability Purposive sampling technique was used. A self-structured questionnaire was distributed among 357 health care professionals working in different hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Mean age of participants was 29.93 ± 7.734 in which 178 were males and 179 were females. Around 89.9% participants were having awareness about the Physical Therapy (PT) services. 68.9% reported that physical therapist has direct access to the patient. Referral to physical therapy was found to be 87.1%. Basic qualification of physical therapist were known by 64.1 % and 45.4% did not ever heard about specialization running in physical therapy degree. It is concluded that health care professionals had a good awareness about physical therapy profession. But the

awareness needed to be augmented in terms of referral patients and specialized services provided by PT.

Key words: Physical therapy, Awareness, Health care professionals.

INTRODUCTION

Health care professionals are those who provide promotional, curative, preventative as well as rehabilitative health care services and primarily deals with the study, diagnosing, treating health-related problems and complications (1). Physical Therapy (PT) is over top of the pyramid of health care professionals. PT is a dynamic health care profession that uses a holistic approach to assist and support individuals with achievement, maintenance, and restoration of physical functional capacities and health throughout their lifespan (2). World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) defines Physical Therapy as "health care profession which is concerned with identifying and improves quality of life, human function and movement potential within the spheres of, prevention, restoration, intervention, maintenance, promotion, habilitation, and rehabilitation. This encompasses physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing (3). Physical therapy as a health care profession was formally recognized in the second decade of the 20th century, after World War I (1914-1918), whereas the profession was endorsed due to numerous emerging cases of poliomyelitis after World War II (4). Physical Therapy is ranked fifth in best healthcare jobs and eight in the 100 most excellent jobs in 2013 (5). In Pakistan Physical Therapy has seen drastic changes over the last two decades. The school of Physiotherapy was established in 1956 by the Federal Government, Ministry of Health & Social Welfare with the assistance of the World Health Organization (WHO). In 2007, for the first time in the country, the Doctor of Physical Therapy was introduced. The four years BSPT Program was upgraded to 5 years DPT (Doctor of Physiotherapy) Program in 2008. (6) In Pakistan estimated disability ratio is 9.5% of the total population (JICA "Country Profile on Disability: Pakistan" March 2002). There is a need for comprehensive rehabilitation is integral to the accomplishment of a better quality of life. At this time, health care professionals have very little awareness about the role of the physical therapists in the health care team. Because of lack of awareness referrals of patients to the physical therapist were not recognized properly. In India, the study was done about awareness and perspective among referring doctors which stated that 95.9% of doctors reported that they refer their patients amongst different health professionals while 56% of doctors having an objection to the physiotherapist having an autonomous practice (7). In the study of Acharya R S in Nepal reported that only 39.1% of the clinical doctors knew about physical therapy education. (8) The evidence based practice also plays a vital role in the health care system, which must be applied and understood by every health care provider included the physical therapist (9). The curative response of the physical therapy throughout the world is accepted, but it still passes from the struggling phase in Pakistan. Studies related to different areas will be needed to understand the perception of the physical therapy profession among different health care professionals (10). The proper knowledge about the physical therapy treatments can help the other health care providers to preclude the complications as well as longer hospital stays (11). The comprehensive

care of any individual patient requires the basic knowledge and skills about the disease condition, which the clinician cannot provide alone (12). The inadequate health literacy of the patient is interrelated to poorer results(13). This concept can also be applicable to the practitioner if they have less knowledge about the physical therapy. The physical therapist exemplify their vision by transforming the society through movements optimization in order to improve the human experience regarding life (14). Despite the acknowledgment and advances gained worldwide in physical therapy, yet there is a lack of research studies in Pakistan to assess the awareness of physical therapy among health care professionals. Hence this study was conducted to determine the awareness and perception of the physical therapy profession and to determine the frequency of physical therapy as a choice of preference for referral patients among health care practitioners, and also identify the reasons for which practitioners do not select Physical Therapy as the first choice of treatment for their patients.

METHODOLOGY

This is an observational cross-sectional study conducted in different hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad with a sample size of 357 participants. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. The participants included general practitioners, specialist practitioners (consultants), hospital residents/registrars belonging to any clinical field or specialty, postgraduate students and other doctors. Data was collected through a self-structured questionnaire which was filled by the concerned medical practitioner from different hospitals. Questionnaire items were designed to identify awareness about physical therapy and consisted of 17 questions. Questionnaires included three sections i.e. demographics, general questions, and awareness about physical therapy profession. The awareness section included questions regarding, general thoughts about physical therapy practice, department, Direct access, Quality of life, PT in the Intensive care unit, multidisciplinary team, referral, feedback, pre and post-operative physical therapy services, basic qualification, specializations, satisfaction, and Physical Therapy services in the emergency department. The questionnaire was filled by health care practitioners. The data was analyzed through Statistical Package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 22. Descriptive statistics were applied to the data to report the result of the study.

RESULTS

Three hundred and fifty-seven health care professionals participated in this study. Out of which 178 were males 179 were female. The mean age of participants was 29.93 ± 7.734 . Participants were included in the study were 32.5% house officers having 1 year of experience, 21.8% medical officers, 18.5 % postgraduate trainee, 9.8% senior registrar, 6.7% consultants, 2.5 % surgeons, and 8.1% general physicians. Results show that out of 357 health practitioners 89.9% were known about physical therapy out of which 42.6% only defined physical therapy. 79.0% of health practitioners know that there is the department of physical therapy in settings they are currently working but 17.1% were not known in spite of the fact that physical therapy department was available in their setups. 68.9% health practitioners were known that physical therapist has direct access to the patient. Direct access enables patients to seek services that they need without

restriction. Physical therapists have a significant impact on improving the quality of life of patients. 93.8% said that physical therapy treatment improves patient's quality of life. 78.8% practitioners said that Physical therapists play a very important role in intensive care unit and PT is a part of ICU team but 15.1 % health practitioners did not ever hear about the role of the physical therapist in the intensive care unit. 95.0 % said that physical therapy is an important part of a multidisciplinary team and physical therapist worked in coordination with other health care professionals to meet an individual's needs. 87.1% of health practitioners were referring their patients who need physical therapy treatment, out of them the mean number of patients referred during the last 2 weeks was 3.28 ± 4.86 . While 44% did not refer their patients. The result shows 19.3% said that stroke is the most common condition for referral to a physical therapist. 18.2% of health practitioners refer their patients to a physical therapists with musculoskeletal problems, 6.2% with postoperative, 7.3% for chest physical therapy, and 5.3% who are bed-bound.

72.5 % of health practitioners reported that they got positive feedback from patients after physical therapy treatment. 81.8% said that pre-operative and post-operative physical therapy improves patient outcomes. 64.1 % were known about the basic qualifications of physical therapists, 26.1 % did not know. Out of which 52.6% said that basic qualification of PT is graduation, 9.5% said diploma, and 3.6% said that basic qualification of PT is masters.39.5% of health practitioners knew about specializations running in physical therapy degree.45.4% did not ever hear about specialization. 56.6% of health practitioners said that they are satisfied with physical therapy services provided in their settings. 38.1% did not ever visit physical therapy department working in their settings.60.8% were visited Physical Therapy department. 59.7% of practitioners did not even know about the role of physical therapists in the emergency departments. 41.2 % reported that they were visited a physical therapists for their musculoskeletal problems, 26.6% said that their experience after utilizing physical therapy was good, 12.6% satisfactory and 1.4% said that they had a bad experience after utilizing PT services. 14.6% said that there is a need for awareness about physical therapy practice. 18.8% said to improve quality of treatment and 8.7% said that physical therapy services should be available at 24 hours.

DISCUSSION

This study helped the community about the awareness of physical therapy in health care providers, though some of the responses of the participants suggested that the awareness about the PT is in vague manner among the health care professionals. The role of the physical therapy services in the ICU is also acknowledged by various health care professional. The study of Howard et al also suggested that physical therapy services in the emergency department can benefit the patient in various conditions and can facilitate the other health care professionals (15). The current study suggested that the awareness and knowledge of health care professional about the physical therapy are of prime focus because it can improve the quality services of a multidisciplinary team. It is also noted that inter-professional training and communication in between the medical and health professional regarding the physiotherapy services can help the community in different ways (16). The health care professional in the current study referred their patients for the physical therapy services. In the study of Acharya, R. S referral to physiotherapy

was found to be 94.8 %, 63% and 93% for preoperative cases, general conditions and post-operative cases respectively (8). Direct access enables physical therapists to practice as the primary practitioner in health care services and enables patients to seek services that they need without restriction. The health care professional in the current study suggested that 68.9% of the patients have direct access to the physical therapy services, which approximately same as in the study conducted by Tracy J. Bury et al. in 2012 and suggested that direct access to physical therapy was 58%, with greater prevalence in private settings (17). 72.5 % of health practitioners said that they got positive feedback from patients after physical therapy treatment. 81.8% said that pre-operative and post-operative physical therapy improves patient's outcomes. As per the study of Sara Ijaz et al about the physical therapy role in burn department suggested that more qualified professionals can provided better management of the wounds(18) . The therapist knowledge and skills is directly related to the patient satisfaction and treatment. Results of the current study showed that 56.6% of health practitioners reported that they are satisfied with physical therapy services provided in their settings, which is also noted by Mariam Talpuret al. in 2015 that respondents from different departments admitted the physiotherapy effectiveness for their patients and received the responses of 20% from medicine and surgery department, 24% from gynecology & obstetrics and 18% from pediatrician(19).

CONCLUSION

As per results obtained from the study, concluded that the health care professionals had good awareness and knowledge about the physical therapy profession. Most of the physicians are least comfortable for sharing the responsibility for decision making when referring their patients to physical therapists. The outcome of the study emphasizes the need of educating health care professionals on the usefulness of physical therapy practice.

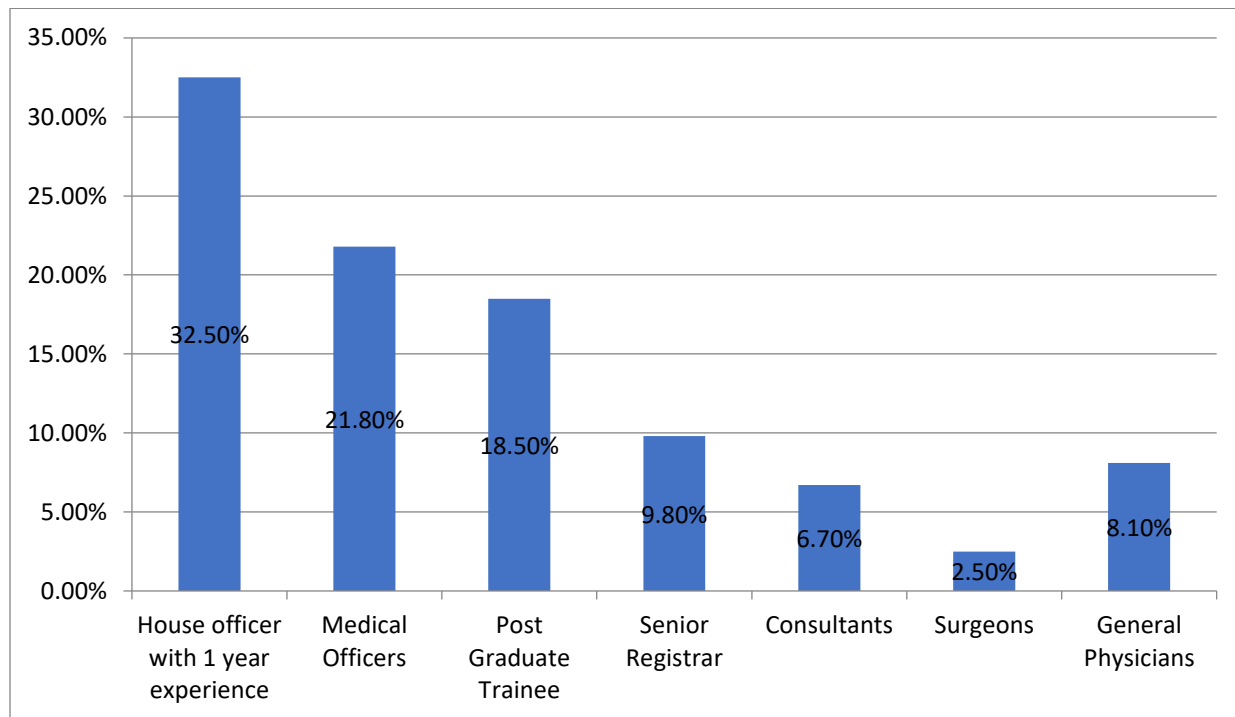


Figure 1: Percentage of Health Care Professionals included in study

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