



PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

Declaration of Principles

MALTA ASSOCIATION OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Professional Autonomy

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Endorsed by the members of the Malta Association of Physiotherapists

November 2007

Members of



Foreword

Physiotherapy is an established and regulated profession, with specific professional aspects of clinical practice and education, indicative of diversity in social, economic and political contexts*; it is clearly a single profession, and the first professional qualification obtained in Malta represents the completion of a curriculum that qualifies the physiotherapist to use his professional title and to practice as an independent practitioner with the necessary acquired competences including ability in decision making.

Physiotherapy is a service that incorporates assessment, diagnosis, planning, intervention and evaluation of movement dysfunctions of the body. Such a service shall only be provided by, or under the direction and supervision of a physiotherapist and applies to different healthcare settings whether through the National Health Service or in the private sector.

Physiotherapy is concerned with identifying and maximising movement potential, within the spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. It involves the interaction between the physiotherapist and the patients or clients, and extends to the families, care givers and other health care providers, in a process of assessing movement potential and in establishing agreed upon goals and objectives using knowledge and skills unique to physiotherapy.

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* European Physiotherapy Benchmark Statement – ER-WCPT (2003)

A. The physiotherapist as a registered healthcare practitioner

A.1. Professional autonomy and accountability of the physiotherapist

Professional autonomy is possible for individual physiotherapists as they practice with their patients and care givers to reach a diagnosis which will direct their physiotherapy intervention. If the diagnostic process reveals findings that are not within the scope of the physiotherapist' knowledge, experience or expertise, the physiotherapist will refer the patient to another appropriate health care provider.

As such, the physiotherapist

- Understands the legal responsibilities;†
- Understands the ethical considerations of professional practice as outlined in the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct;
- Conforms to the Rules of Professional Conduct as published by the World Confederation for Physical Therapy as well as the 'Code of Practice – Physiotherapy' published by the Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine and the Standards of Practice of the Malta Association of Physiotherapists;
- Appreciates the significance of professional self-regulation;
- Acknowledges the boundaries of professional competence in a changing health care environment;
- Is committed to continuing professional development in order to enhance competence to practise;
- Participates in the continuation and development of the profession;
- Recognises the significance of clinical effectiveness in the delivery of physiotherapy.

A.2. Professional Relationships

The physiotherapist

- Participates effectively in inter-professional approaches to health care delivery;
- Assists other health care professionals in professional practice;

† Health Care Professions Act 2003

- Acknowledges cross-professional boundaries and employs appropriate referral procedures;
- Initiates and maintains effective interactions with relevant external agencies including other health care professionals;
- Deploys and manages staff effectively and efficiently.

A.3. Profession and employer context

The physiotherapist

- Delivers physiotherapy practice in the context of patient centrality;
- Demonstrates an understanding of the health care system in Malta and an awareness of current developments happening in the health and social care sectors;
- Understands the scope of physiotherapy in a range of health care settings;
- Recognises the importance of non-discriminatory practice;
- Is aware of contemporary health and safety legislation and integrates into physiotherapy practice;
- Plays an active role in health education and health promotion programmes;
- Recognises the wide reaching value of research and scholarly activity within the health care and professional context.

A.4. Personal and professional skills

The physiotherapist

- Makes professional judgements confidently;
- Reflects on professional practice and engages in appropriate self-directed learning;
- Demonstrates a high level of communication skills;
- Preserves patient dignity;
- Initiates and responds to change in a flexible manner;
- Operates with a suitable degree of self protection.

B. Physiotherapy Skills and their application to practice

The physiotherapist possesses a broad range of core skills encompassing profession-specific and generic enabling skills. Physiotherapy practice, and the application of professional skills, is underpinned by knowledge and understanding that is qualified through Higher Educational Authority.

B.1. Profession Specific Skills

These skills determine the boundaries of the professional practice of physiotherapy in such a way that through accredited and legally recognised procedures, allows the physiotherapist to be competent in addressing the following issues, vis-à-vis decision making and actuation.

i. Assessment

- Identifying the physical limitations, whilst recognising the pathophysiological, psychological, socio-economical and cultural needs of individuals and communities;
- Gathering and recording information from a wide range of sources and by a variety of methods;
- Forming a diagnosis on the basis of physiotherapy assessment;
- Analysing and synthesising information gathered from assessment data and the clinical problem solving process.

ii. Treatment planning:

- Making the patient central to delivery of care;
- Making decisions, setting goals and constructing specific plans to achieve these, taking into account relevant contextual factors;
- Applying problem solving and clinical reasoning to the assessment findings in order to plan, prioritise and implement appropriate physiotherapy.

iii. Evaluation and research

- Using clinical reasoning approaches in the selection, justification and review of appropriate treatments;

- The development and use of outcome measures for evaluating physiotherapy;
- Making judicious use of the best available information and evidence;
- Formulating a research question, the development of a research design and the implementation of the research process.

iv. Physiotherapy Intervention

Therapeutic Exercise

- Making decisions, setting goals and constructing specific exercise programs that will have a positive therapeutic or health enhancing effect.
- Planning, delivering and evaluating exercise programs for individuals and groups.

Manual Therapy

- The application of mobilisation, respiratory physiotherapy, neurotherapeutic-handling and soft tissue mobilisation techniques. Different concepts and approaches contribute to the development of these physiotherapy interventions.
- Facilitation and restoration of movement and function.

Electrotherapeutic Modalities

- The application of a range of modalities based on the utilisation of electrical, thermal, light, sound and magnetic energy are used to bring about physiological and therapeutic effects in order to alleviate patient symptoms and restore optimum function.

B.2. Generic and Enabling skills

i. Communication and information technology

- Interpersonal communication using written, verbal and non- verbal modes;
- Teaching and presentation for individuals and groups;
- Using information technology to identify and access information, to record and manage patient data and to process and analyse research findings;
- Handling information with due regard for legal and ethical requirements as being stated by the data protection principles and Standards of Practice.

ii. Personal and professional development

- Managing uncertainty, change and stress;
- Time-management and workload planning;
- Identifying individual learning needs;
- Constructing and implementing a personal development plan;
- Reflecting and modifying behaviour in the light of experience and advice;
- Working with others, negotiation, conciliation, and development of partnerships;
- Setting realistic goals related to personal development;
- Recognising the significance of continuing professional development;
- Team working and leadership skills;
- Making clinical judgments based on the quality of available evidence.

C. Physiotherapy: subject knowledge, understanding and associated skills

Graduate physiotherapists are acknowledged after having obtained 240 ECTS[‡], independently validated (moderated by an external examiner) and accredited as being at a standard that affords graduates full statutory and professional recognition. The university course programme delivers a curriculum that enables physiotherapists to attain the knowledge, skills and attributes described in the guidelines for basic entry-level into the profession.

C.1. The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of Biological Sciences:

- Human anatomy and physiology, emphasising the dynamic relationships of human structure and function and focusing on the musculoskeletal, cardiorespiratory and nervous systems;
- Application of physiotherapy in physiological and structural change;
- Human growth and development across the lifespan;
- Factors influencing individual variations in human ability.

C.2. The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of Physical Sciences:

- Specific principles and theories from physics, biomechanics, applied exercise science and ergonomics that can be applied to physiotherapy;
- The means by which the physical sciences can inform the understanding and analysis of movement and function;
- The principles and application of measurement techniques based on biomechanics or electrophysiology;
- The application of anthropometric and ergonomic principles.

C.3. The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of Behavioural Sciences:

- Psychological and social factors that influence an individual in health and illness;

[‡] ECTS refers to European Credit Transfer System. 240 ECTS equates to the conferring of a Bachelors Degree in Physiotherapy.

- The application of psychology and sociology in understanding health, illness and health care in the context of physiotherapy and the incorporation of this knowledge into physiotherapeutic practices;
- Theories of communication. In physiotherapy communication and interpersonal skills are vital to competent and effective practice informing effective interaction with patients, peers, managers, carers and other health care professionals;
- Learning theories. The process of learning is important for both the patient and the practitioner. These theories underpin continuing professional development, enabling physiotherapists to be effective lifelong learners. This knowledge also assists the physiotherapist to become an effective teacher in a wide range of contexts e.g. health education and the education of students;
- Team working and leadership.

C.4. The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of Clinical Sciences:

- Pathological changes and related clinical features of conditions commonly encountered by physiotherapists;
- Changes that result from physiotherapy including physiological, structural, behavioural and function;
- The theoretical basis of assessment and treatment and the scientific evaluation of effectiveness;
- Principles of evaluation and research methodologies which enable the integration of theoretical perspectives and research evidence into design and implementation of effective physiotherapy;
- The theories supporting problem solving and clinical reasoning.

D. Service delivery and professional practice

D.1. Service/organisational issues

The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of:

- The changing and diverse context within which physiotherapy is delivered;
- An appreciation of the implications of different organisational settings and patterns of working;
- Quality assurance frameworks encompassing e.g. clinical governance, clinical guidelines and professional standards;
- Issues of resource management, cost effectiveness, marketing and promotion of the profession;
- Performance indicators and outcome measures derived from a range of scientific and measurement approaches;
- The factors influencing the management of themselves and others;
- Safety at work-practices including risk assessment;
- The planning of service delivery and its associated workforce.

D.2. Social and political issues

The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of:

- The impact of health and social care policies on professional practice;
- Factors contributing to social differences, the problems of inequalities and the needs of different social groups;

D.3. Ethical and moral dimensions

The physiotherapist has the knowledge and understanding of:

- The ethical, legal and professional issues that inform and shape physiotherapy practice;
- Professional, statutory and regulatory codes of practice;
- Professional code of conduct, values and beliefs.

Summary

The physiotherapists' extensive knowledge of the body, and its movement needs and potential, is central to determining diagnosis and intervention/treatment strategies. Thus, physiotherapists are qualified and professionally able to undertake a comprehensive examination/assessment/evaluation of the patient, formulate a diagnosis, prognosis and plan, provide consultation within their expertise and determine when the patient needs to be referred to another healthcare professional, implement a physiotherapy treatment programme and determine the outcomes of any treatments.

Therefore physiotherapists operate as independent practitioners, able to act as first contact practitioners whereby patients may seek direct services without referral from another healthcare professional. It is fundamental to professional autonomy that individual physiotherapists should have the freedom to exercise their professional judgement, in any work setting, whether they are working in health promotion, prevention or in the management, treatment/intervention and rehabilitation of patients – as long as it is within the physiotherapist's knowledge and competence.

A corollary of the profession's right of professional autonomy is that it has a continued responsibility to self-regulate. The actions and conduct of physiotherapists must always be within the boundaries of the professional code of ethics that governs the physiotherapist locally. It is encouraged that the public recognises the authority of the profession to regulate itself.

Reference:

- Code of Practice – Physiotherapy, Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine – Malta, April 2006
- Declaration of Principle, item 11.2 part 2 , WCPT 16th General Meeting, 31st May – 2nd June
- European Physiotherapy Benchmark Statement, European Region of World Confederation for Physical Therapy, June 2003
- WCPT guidelines for Physical Therapist Professional Entry-Level Education, WCPT 16th General Meeting, 31st May – 2nd June
- Health Care Professions Act 2003 Chapter 464, Health Care Professions
- A Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct for Physiotherapists, Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine, February 2002