

Communiqué

Physiotherapy Extended Scope of Practice Project: Phase 1

Update: June 2008

Focus Group Findings ⇒

The aim of the focus groups was to investigate the current practice of physiotherapists in ACT public health, establish existing barriers to patient care and the physiotherapist's perceptions on extension of scope as a means to overcome these barriers. Eight focus groups were conducted in the following areas of clinical speciality and included physiotherapists of varying experience, working in acute and community settings:

- Womens Health
- Paediatrics
- Therapy ACT (developmental delay)
- Rehabilitation
- Cardiopulmonary
- Acute neurology
- Hospital-based outpatients and inpatient orthopaedics
- Community-based outpatients
- "Mop-up Day"

The attendees were provided with background information regarding the aims of the project and four key questions to consider prior to attending. Throughout the session the therapists were asked to consider whether their current roles are within current scope of practice (skills set out by the Australian Physiotherapy Council, July 2006), "grey" scope of practice (lacking in clarity) or out of scope of practice (not legally permitted). This information was used to create the current practice report.

There were many common barriers to patient care expressed across the clinical areas. These barriers were in relation to timely access to appropriate care, the length and number of "stops" in the patient's journey, continuity of patient care, therapist efficiency and efficacy, and quality of patient care.

Potential extended scope tasks that the physiotherapists felt would reduce the barriers fall into three broad categories:

1. Extension of practice consultation
2. Extension of diagnostics
3. Extension of therapeutics

Tasks included referral to medical specialists, referral for diagnostic imaging, prescribing/administering medications and expert clinical management.

The physiotherapists identified potential extended scope roles across five clinical areas:

1. Orthopaedics
2. Emergency Department
3. Obstetrics
4. Gynaecology
5. Developmental delay

Comparison with the literature ⇒

When compared with the literature there is support for roles within orthopaedics and the emergency department. In the remaining areas the literature is silent, however it was proposed that the benefits may be similar to those in the other areas, these include:

- Reduced burden on the medical team
- Reduced waiting times for patients
- Increased patient satisfaction
- Improve diagnostic accuracy
- ?reduce need for elective surgery

Next steps ⇒

The next steps will include a higher level assessment of the requirements for a pilot of an extended scope physiotherapy role, with input from all of the relevant stakeholders. This will include a Delphi study to be undertaken by CAHE

Project Contact ⇒

Feedback and questions are always welcome. Please contact the Allied Health Advisors Office on: (02) 6205 0893.