



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AWARENESS AMONGST MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF HYSIOTHERAPY.

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Abstract

Background: The present study was conducted to evaluate the level of awareness about physiotherapy among medical professionals.

Methods: 110 medical professionals from Punjab, Haryana and Jammu participated in the survey study. They were required to complete a 21 item self developed closed-ended questionnaire.

Results: The data revealed that 96.2% respondents were aware of the physiotherapy profession, 94.3% people knew it as a professional course, 41.5% people are aware of the course duration, 67.9% people were not aware of the various specialized fields in physiotherapy and only 47.2% people are aware of the physiotherapy curriculum. 96.2% of the respondents are aware of the role of physiotherapy in various conditions, 50.9% consulted a physiotherapist. 58.3% got awareness through lectures given by physiotherapist, 81.1% thought that the physiotherapists are trained enough to plan the treatment and 52.8% think that medical professionals are trained enough to prescribe physiotherapy treatment for the patients and 50.9% of participants write prescriptions while referring the patients for physiotherapy. 83.1% respondents think that physiotherapy is not still limited to orthopaedics or sports field.

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Introduction:-

The physiotherapy profession has emerged not only as an important medical and rehabilitation complement in health care delivery but also as a vital therapeutic tool with defined scientifically based protocols (American Physical Therapy Association, 1997). It is widely used in health institutions, private practices, schools, sports and work place settings (Hogue, 2005). Physicians have profound influence on other health professions including physiotherapy as they are at the 'top of the pyramid' of health care professionals (Silva, 2005). Generally, patients still rely on physicians for recommendation to other health care professionals. Medical referrals serve not only as a tool for communication, but as an indicator of the level of awareness of physiotherapy by referring health care professionals (Quartey, 2009).

The practice of physiotherapy as a 'prescription' rather than as a referral, on a consultation basis, is now discouraged in some developed countries. Physiotherapists, often mainly depend on referrals from physicians from the different fields of practice of medicine. The practice of 'prescribing physiotherapy' by most physicians has been of great concern to physiotherapist worldwide (Balogun, 1998; Struber, 2003). Unfortunately, these prescriptions are often wrong (Ross, 2000; Dickson, 2001). This practice of including the prescription of modalities in the referral for

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physiotherapy is an indication of the wrong attitude and/or poor knowledge by these physicians about the role of physiotherapy in health care delivery (Dunkel, 2004; Savinor and Shepherd, 2004).

According to Jackson (2004), lack of or poor knowledge about a profession may lead to misconceptions about the profession and inter-professional conflicts. Thus, good awareness of the role of physiotherapy in health care delivery may influence its use. Therefore, the present study was aimed to evaluate the physicians' awareness of physiotherapy.

Aim of the Study:-

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the awareness of physicians about the applications of physiotherapy and its specializations.

Research Problem:-

Are all the medical professionals who are to refer patients to physiotherapy treatment aware of the benefit of physiotherapy services?

Need of the study:-

The need of the study is to find out the awareness of benefits of physiotherapy amongst medical professionals.

Materials and Methods:-**Study design:-**

Observational study design.

Source of subjects:-

Medical physicians working in academic institution as well as hospitals in Punjab, Haryana and Jammu.

Sample:-

The study was approved by Institutional ethical committee, GianSagar group of Institutes. The subjects for this study were recruited from different departments and should be having at least two years of post qualification experience. The subjects who were uncooperative were not made part of study.

110 participants were randomly selected and after taking written informed consent, a questionnaire was given to them. The questionnaire was self prepared by the researcher. The questions mostly were mostly closed ended and few were open ended. A small pilot study was conducted prior on 5 physicians to ensure that the questions are clearly stated and understandable to the respondents. The initial 6 questions were focused on the institution of highest degree, clinical experience, level of awareness of physiotherapy and whether the institution had physiotherapy course. Question no 7 was focused on awareness to curriculum of physiotherapy. Question no 8 to 21 were designed in such a way that they targeted the awareness of medical professional to different domains of physiotherapy. The total duration of study was 3 months.

Results:-

The data was analyzed using Microsoft excel software of windows 7 ultimate. The data was presented as percentage distribution of the subjects. The data was presented in the form of percentage distribution of the responses of the participants to various questions.

Discussion:-

The present study was designed to evaluate the level of awareness of medical professionals to the curriculum and clinical applications of physiotherapy. The study was conducted on 110 medical professionals of Punjab, Haryana and Jammu with clinical experience of 2 years or more. Majority of the participants included in the study were post-graduates and were aware of the profession of physiotherapy. More than half of the participants reported that the institution of their graduation or post-graduation was having full-fledged physiotherapy degree course. This might be due to the reason that majority of private medical colleges in India are running graduation course in physiotherapy. There were few respondents who were aware of the course duration and curriculum of physiotherapy. Quite surprisingly, very little number of respondents was aware of the vast domain of clinical applications of physiotherapy.

This gives an impression that large number of awareness lectures highlighting the role of physiotherapy in various conditions need to be arranged so as to make them aware of the vast list of conditions that can be improved by physiotherapy. This finding and suggestion was also in agreement with a study done by Odebiyi et al., 2010, where the authors also advocated the need of lectures by physiotherapists as well as clinicians during gatherings involving healthcare providers, particularly who have graduated from the institute that does not impart physiotherapy education.

Almost all the medical professionals were aware of the physiotherapy and the mode of awareness was both through a lecture by both medical professional as well as a physiotherapist during medical training program or in seminar or conference. Three-fourth of the professionals used to refer their patients for physiotherapy treatment. The number of patients referred for physiotherapy has been directly linked to the knowledge of physiotherapy through some lecture or during medical training, with more number of referred patients by physicians who are aware of the profession. This finding was in accordance with the study done by Fertig et al., 1993 who also reported an association between the physiotherapy training and number of patients referred.

It was quite encouraging to find that 81% of the physicians think that the physiotherapists are trained enough to assess and plan their treatment accordingly. Still, it was surprising to notice that half of the physicians think that they are capable enough to plan the treatment and almost half of the participants write the prescription while they are referring the patients for physiotherapy treatment. The use of physiotherapy as a prescription has also been linked to the professionals, who studied from the institutes which don't have physiotherapy program might be linked to limited awareness of the clinical applications of physiotherapy. Awareness camps should be encouraged to avoid any inter-professional conflicts since limited knowledge about any profession leads only to misconceptions (Jackson, 2004). Thus, the practice of including prescription of modalities in physiotherapy referral has been attributed to the wrong attitude and limited knowledge of physiotherapy in health care delivery (Dunkel, 2004; Savinor and Shepherd, 2004). Surprisingly, almost 88% of the physicians highlighted the service of physiotherapy to improve.

Therefore, it can be concluded that medical professionals, though are aware of physiotherapy as a profession but their knowledge on the benefits of physiotherapy in various conditions is limited. Still many medical professionals have limited the domain of physiotherapy to orthopaedics and sports.

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Conflict of Interest:-None

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Table 1:-General information and level of awareness of the participants to physiotherapy curriculum

S.No	Criteria	Yes (%)
1.	Post graduate respondents	73.5%
2.	Institute having Physiotherapy course	54.7%
3.	Awareness of physiotherapy	96.2%
4.	Professional course	94.3%
5.	Aware of course duration	41.5%
6.	Aware of physiotherapy curriculum	47.2%
7.	Aware of physiotherapy specialized fields	67.9%
8.	Whether PT still limited to orthopaedics or sports	16.9%

73.5% of the participants have done their post-graduation and 54.7% reported that the institution of their graduation/post-graduation also had physiotherapy course. 96.2% of the respondents were aware of physiotherapy and 94.3% were aware of physiotherapy being a professional course. Less than half of the participants i.e. 41.5% and 47.2% of the participants were aware of the physiotherapy course duration and curriculum respectively, but 67.2% were aware of the specialized fields of physiotherapy. Few of the participants (16.9%) still believes that areas of application of physiotherapy are still limited to orthopaedics and sports only.

Table2:-Mode and Extent of Awareness of Participants to Clinical Applications of Physiotherapy

S.No	Criteria	Yes (%)
1.	Aware of role of physiotherapy in various conditions	96.2%
2.	Ever consulted physiotherapist	50.9%
3.	Awareness of role of physiotherapy through some lecture by medical professional in seminar/conference or course curriculum	41.7%
4.	Awareness of role of physiotherapy through some lecture by physiotherapist in seminar/conference or course curriculum	58.3%
5.	Whether lecture was beneficial	95.5%
6.	Whether patient referred for PT Rx	75.5%
7.	Whether patient referred increased	26.5%

Table.2:- describes the extent of awareness of the medical professional to the clinical applications of physiotherapy and also the mode by which they became aware of various areas of applications to physiotherapy. 96.2% of the participants were aware of the role of physiotherapy in various conditions and 50.9% have consulted physiotherapy for themselves or their family. 41.7% of the participants got aware of the applications of physiotherapy through a lecture by some medical professional during a seminar or conference or during their curriculum and 58.3% got aware through a lecture by a physiotherapist. 95.5% of the participants have reported the awareness lecture to be beneficial. 75.5% of the participants refer patients for physiotherapy and there was increase of 26.5% participants who started referring patients after the awareness lecture.

Table 3:-Approach of participants while referring patients for physiotherapy

S.No	Criteria	Yes (%)
1.	Whether PTs trained enough to plan Rx	81.1%
2.	Whether medicos trained enough to plan PT Rx	52.8%
3.	Whether write prescriptions while referring for PT	50.9%
4.	Do you think whether patient referred for PT at appropriate time for his betterment	98.1%
5.	Whether PTs service need to improve	88.7%

Table.3:- describes the approach of physicians while referring the patients for physiotherapy management. 81.1% participants believe that the physiotherapists are trained enough to assess and plan the treatment on their own. 52.8% of participants think that the medical professionals are trained enough to plan the physiotherapy treatment and 50.9% of the participants write detailed physiotherapy prescription while referring the patient. 98.1% of the participants stressed on the timely referral of patient to physiotherapy treatment for his betterment. Surprisingly 88.7% of the participants have highlighted that the physiotherapy services needs to be improved.

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