

## Confusion surrounding title "physical therapist" in Ireland

**Irish physiotherapists are warning that people who call themselves "physical therapists" are not always members of the profession.**

Since its establishment, WCPT has always asserted that the titles physical therapist or physiotherapist, and abbreviations and translations of these, are the sole preserve of persons who hold recognised qualifications approved by national professional associations which are members of WCPT.

But in many countries, either the name physiotherapist or physical therapist (or both) is not protected by law, meaning that others can legally use the terms to describe what they do. This is the case in Ireland, where although the name physiotherapist is protected, physical therapist is not.

"In the Republic of Ireland the titles of physiotherapist and physical therapist cannot be used interchangeably because a group calling themselves 'physical therapists' are not physical therapists/physiotherapists as defined by WCPT," says Karen Gunn, President of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists. "These physical therapists are not eligible for membership of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists and are not permitted to work in the National Public Health Service in the Republic of Ireland."

There are several hundred people in Ireland called physical therapists having completed a 16-weekend a year diploma course over three years. Their training focuses on the manual treatment of the soft tissues. The Irish association is concerned that there may be confusion if these people apply for jobs outside Ireland, in countries where the words "physical therapist" are understood differently.

Karen Gunn advised WCPT member organisations: "In the interests of protecting the public in your countries from potential confusion over titles I would ask you to bring this matter to the immediate attention of the relevant people/committee in your organisation who deal with foreign applications."

WCPT has a clear policy on protection of title, calling on the governments of member organisations to enact legislation, where it does not already exist, to protect the public by limiting the use of these titles to appropriately qualified persons.

"The current situation in Ireland is inconsistent with the rest of the world. This can lead to public confusion, and we want to make sure that people see the service provider they are expecting," said Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General.

In a declaration of principle drawn up in 1995, WCPT calls on the governments of member organisations to refrain from developing generic classifications that deny the specificity of physical therapy.

In Ireland, there are new hopes that the situation may be rectified. The Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists has been lobbying parliament for the past year and a half to get the regulations changed, and according to Ruaidhri O'Connor, Chief Executive, there's hope that when a new physiotherapy registration board is established in Ireland later this year, both

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titles will become protected.

If you know of any problems or confusion surrounding the titles of “physiotherapist” or “physical therapist” in your country, please contact WCPT News at [news@wcpt.org](mailto:news@wcpt.org)

