Direct access to physical therapy in the Netherlands

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NIVEL:
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...about the provision and use of health care services
Presentation

• Introduction
  Dutch healthcare system
  Introduction of direct access to physical therapy (PT)

• Results direct access physical therapy
  Patient population
  Motives
  Treatment
  Results
  Experiences PTs

• Conclusions
Healthcare system in the Netherlands

- Standard insurance for all (+ additional private packages)
- Clients can change insurer every year: insurers compete for more clients
- Insurers choose best provider & set requirements
- Providers work in more performance-oriented manner
Roles changed…..

The patients’ role is more central; patients have more opportunities to choose the best available care provider.

Direct access to PT can be seen within the scope of this changing health care system and enlarged freedom of choice.
Physical therapy in the Netherlands

13,000 physical therapists working in private practices

16 million inhabitants
  of which 20% used physical therapy in 2008

Until 2006 accessible via GP (90%) or specialist (10%)

GP gatekeeper of health care
Timeline

- 2001: Feasibility study
- 2003
- 2005
- 2006: Direct access PT
- 2008: Direct access other professions primary health care

- Legislation
- Development guideline communication PT-GP
- Post-graduate course
- Campaign

Direct access PT
Feasibility study: interviews (2001)
Pilot study (restricted area) 2003

- Positive experience patients, GPs and PTs
- 10% of patients used direct access
- Volume patient population remained equal

Recommended:
- Specific (post-doctoral) education
- Guidelines for co-operation & communication between GPs & PTs
2005: PTs followed a mandatory post-graduate course:

- process of screening
- detecting “red & yellow flags”
- communication/co-operation PT and GP
Large national promotion campaign:
• TV
• Radio
• National and regional newspapers
• Busses (Amsterdam)
January 2006

Direct access to physical therapy:

- Evaluation/treatment by a PT possible without referral
- Most insurance companies reimburse direct access without further restrictions, although sometimes limited to preferred providers
- For patients with chronic diseases referral is still needed for reimbursement
Screening ≠ medical diagnosis

Pattern of symptoms recognizable

Pattern of symptoms not recognizable

Pattern of symptoms recognizable, course abnormal

Red flags present

Consider PT treatment

Advice to contact GP
Research questions:

1. How many patients use direct access?
2. Patients’ motives for using direct access or referral?
3. Are direct access patients different from referred patients?
4. Has the physical therapists’ patients population changed since 2006?
5. What are the experiences of PTs?
Q1) Use of direct access 2006-2008
Q2) Patients’ reasons for direct access (2006)

- has had complaints before (54%)
- ‘knows’ what his/her health problem is (53%)
- knows the specific PT practice (52%)
- saves time (30%)
- PT can better judge whether PT is useful (20%)
Q2) Patients’ reasons for visiting a GP first (2006)

- likes the GP to diagnose and advise (57%)
- GP has a general view of all health problems of the patient (38%)
- did not know direct access (27%)
- was already visiting the GP for another health problem (19%)
- did not know whether direct access would be reimbursed (11%)
Q3) Are direct access patients different from referred patients?

yes

They differ from patients referred by their physician on age, level of education, and on several features of the health problem.
## Determining factors for self referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High educated</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>Lower educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back complaints (not specified)</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>Other diagnoses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck complaints</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Other diagnoses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-19 years</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>&gt; 60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low back pain &lt; 1 month complaints</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>Other diagnoses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familiar with PT</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>Not familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent problem</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>new problem</td>
</tr>
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Examples

higher educated patients aged 20 to 39 years with back complaints existing for less than 1 month: 67% use direct access

lower educated patients aged over 60 years with long existing complaints other than back: 15% use direct access
Differences in treatment

direct access patients are less often taken into treatment after first contact compared to referred patients:

89.0% vs. 96.0%
More often treatment for:

women, elderly and patients with long existing problems or recurrent problems

Examples:

patients aged under 19 years with complaints of short duration: in 74% of the patients treatment is started

patients aged over 60 years with long-lasting problems: in 95% of het patients treatment is started
Differences in number of treatments for self-referrals?

Self-referrals receive 3 treatment sessions less than referred patients, corrected for demographics.
Differences in reasons for discharge

Direct access users:
  88% “treatment finished; goals are reached”
  2%  “patient ended treatment”

Referred patients:
  78% “treatment finished; goals are reached”
  5%  “patient ended treatment”
direct access: 77% goals fully reached
referred: 67% goals fully reached

Bar chart showing:
- Direct access: 3 not, 3 25%, 4 50%, 13 75%, 77 completely
- Referred: 6 not, 5 25%, 6 50%, 17 75%, 67 completely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>42% male</td>
<td>43% male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12% low back</td>
<td>13% low back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33% recurrent</td>
<td>35% recurrent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39% &lt; 1 month</td>
<td>42% &lt; 1 month</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45% familiar with PT</td>
<td>52% familiar with PT</td>
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</table>
Q5 Experiences PTs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>(Very) negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Very positive</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
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Positive experiences PTs

• Acknowledgement profession 68%
• Faster accessibility patients 62%
• Increase responsibility PT 61%
• Freedom of choice patients 59%
• Faster recovery 48%
Negative experiences PTs

- GPs still refer to PT but do not write referral letter anymore 77%
- Increased administration 64%
Conclusions

• PTs are happy with measure. Some negative practical experiences.
• Policy measure aimed at increasing choices for patients: 35% of patients use new measure
• Communication between GP and PT needs attention
• No increase of patient population?
Further research

- Cost-effectiveness (why less treatment visits / results seem better / growing population?)
- Accuracy of diagnostic decision making of PTs (and GPs)
- Experiences patients, GPs and insurers
Thank you for listening!
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