

World Physical Therapy Day ready-made information sheet 5

Article about physical therapy

The article below has been written by WCPT for you to publish in your newsletters, magazines and journals, or to pass on to other publications as background information. Please note that although WCPT is happy for you to reproduce this article, if you are making any changes they should be checked with the WCPT Secretariat. If you refer to “physiotherapists” rather than “physical therapists” in your country, we suggest you change the text appropriately.

Physical therapists: experts in movement for health

By Marilyn Moffat, President of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy

As people live longer and busier lives than ever before, wear and tear and chronic diseases take an increasing toll on their bodies. Every year physical therapists, known in many countries as physiotherapists, help millions of people to manage the effects of aging, illness, accidents, and the stresses and strains of life.

The profession specialises in human movement. Physical therapists identify physical impairments, limitations, and disabilities that prevent people from being as independent as they can be. They analyse the source of problems, determine ways of overcoming them, and maximise the individual’s movement potential. While physical therapists provide treatment, they also promote people’s health, fitness, and wellness.

They have an immense contribution to make. Studies have indicated how efficient they are at treating and preventing back pain, balance disorders, and strength decline. They can help people affected by disease (such as Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, and HIV/AIDS), injury or amputation live better, more independent, lives.

Their contribution is becoming more important, as unhealthy lifestyles cause an explosion of “diseases of civilization” - coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and high blood pressure – around the world. Around 350 million people globally are obese, 180 million people worldwide have diabetes and 210 million individuals have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack and stroke account for 29% of the world’s deaths.

WCPT Secretariat

Kensington Charity Centre • 4th Floor Charles House • 375 Kensington High Street • London W14 8QH • UK
T +44 (0)20 7471 6765 • F +44 (0)20 7471 6766 • info@wcpt.org • www.wcpt.org

Exercise, along with correct diet, is the key to preventing these conditions, physical therapists can provide exercise programmes to both prevent and treat these conditions so that the chance of illness or death is substantially reduced.

Take obesity. Around 350 million people worldwide are obese (body mass index 30 or more). It substantially increases the risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes, peripheral arterial disease, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis and certain cancers. Health care costs will continue to rise as a result of this obesity epidemic, not only due to the costs of actually treating obesity and related disorders, but also due to the costs incurred because of the loss of economic activity from those who are out of work due to obesity-related illness.

Physical therapists are the ideal professionals to prescribe exercise programmes for individuals who are overweight or obese. Weight loss will occur with moderate intensity exercises for about 4.5 hours per week when combined with reduced food intake. Exercise prescriptions may involve daily aerobic conditioning activity (a 30-45 minute steady exercise session or several shorter 10-15 minute exercise sessions per day) alongside resistance or strength training. Aerobic exercise will burn the calories, while strength/resistance training will result in increased strength, increased fat-free mass, and reduced body fat in those who are overweight or obese.

Physical therapists can play a major role in the worldwide obesity epidemic through prevention programmes for children and adolescents, through advocacy in schools, communities and government agencies, and through prescribing increased volume of physical activity and increased fitness in obese patients.

Physical therapy doesn't just mean more healthy people, but more productive people who can contribute to countries' economies.

That's why the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, which was founded in 1951 to represent physical therapists internationally, champions the principle that every individual is entitled to the highest possible standard of culturally-appropriate health services – including physical therapy. These services are provided in an atmosphere of trust and respect for human dignity and underpinned by sound clinical reasoning and scientific evidence.

We strive to improve global health by encouraging high standards of physical therapy research, education and practice; supporting communication and exchange of information among physical therapists worldwide; and collaborating with national and international organisations.

Every year on 8th September, physical therapists around the world use World Physical Therapy Day to draw attention to the contribution the profession can make to the health of individuals and nations. It's an opportunity to say what we do, how we do it, why we do it, and why physical therapists are the movement, physical activity, and exercise experts.

This information may be freely reproduced if unaltered and attributed to Dr Marilyn Moffat, President of WCPT.

© World Confederation for Physical Therapy 2009