

World Physical Therapy Day ready-made information sheet 4

Quotations from Marilyn Moffat, WCPT President

How physical therapists fight non-communicable disease throughout the lifespan

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Non-communicable disease

“When the World Health Organization points out that physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for global mortality, causing 3.2 deaths annually, and that physical activity can reduce non-communicable diseases, it is clear that the profession has a major part to play. In any global actions that emerge from the UN Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases in New York on 19th and 20th September, physical therapists must be central to plans and implementation.”

Obesity

“Physical therapists, as exercise experts, join the worldwide concern for the ever growing epidemic of obesity, which affects adults and children alike. It is probably one of the greatest challenges to our health systems around the world in the 21st century.”

“There are two important interventions to prevent and manage obesity. One is optimal nutrition. The other is increased exercise and physical activity. The potential contribution of physical therapists to the latter approach is immense.”

“Physical activity is any movement of the body that requires the use of our skeletal muscles, which in turn requires energy expenditure. This energy expenditure is basic to weight control. Aerobic exercise prescriptions and recommendations for strength/resistance training must go hand in hand with reduced food intake, and the progression of activity should be gradual, scientifically based, and tailored individually to each person.”

“It is important that the physical therapist finds the most appropriate activity for the individual, so that they will not only enjoy the activity but also have a greater chance of staying with it.”

“There are numerous types of exercise prescriptions that the physical therapist may use in their increasing effort to battle the obesity epidemic. The sooner all our nations begin to adopt initiatives and programmes to combat obesity and other diseases of civilisation, the less will be the burdens on health systems delivery around the world.”

Childhood obesity

“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.”

Diabetes

“Thirty minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week in addition to a healthy diet can drastically reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Physical therapists have a significant role to play in the prevention, delaying, and management of diabetes.”

Cardiovascular disease

“Aerobic exercise increases people’s cardiac output, maximum heart rate, endurance, and arterial blood flow. It may also enhance their blood lipid profiles. For people who already have cardiovascular disease, prescribed aerobic exercise programmes by physical therapists can reduce their risk long-term.”

“Aerobic conditioning activities such as running, rowing and walking along with resistance strength training exercises have been shown to be inversely associated with the risk of coronary heart disease.”

Age-related disease

“As we age, fat mass increases and aerobic capacity and muscle mass decrease if we don’t get enough exercise. This means less oxygen is delivered to key organs, making daily exercise even more difficult, and a vicious cycle can be set up – especially if sedentary behaviour leads to conditions like heart disease. Routine daily activity can break the cycle, reverse the decline, and lead to a longer life.”

“Activity has to be introduced carefully if a person is unfit, older, or has a chronic disease. That’s where physical therapists come in. They examine the person, recommend exercises that are safe and appropriate for them, and educate them about how to look for signs of trouble.”

Cancer

“Physical therapists’ role in reducing the risk of cancer, and helping people recover from its effects, is an important one. The World Health Organization has this year drawn attention to the role of physical activity in reducing cancers – 150 minutes a week of moderate physical activity can reduce the risk of breast and colon cancers, according to WHO’s new Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health.”

“The physical therapy contribution in cancer is a wide one. Studies have also indicated a relationship between higher physical activity levels and lower mortality in cancer survivors. One recent meta-analysis reported that, post-diagnosis, physical activity reduced breast cancer deaths by 34% and disease recurrence by 24% (Ibrahim EM, Al-Homaidh A. Physical activity and survival after breast cancer diagnosis: meta-analysis of published studies. *Med Oncol.* 2010 Apr 22).”

Marilyn Moffat is the President of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, the profession’s global body representing over 350,000 physical therapists around the world. This information may be freely reproduced if unaltered and attributed to Dr Marilyn Moffat, President of WCPT.