Article about physical therapy and non-communicable diseases

This is an article by WCPT’s President, Marilyn Moffat, explaining how physical therapists are at the heart of the global battle against non-communicable diseases like stroke, heart disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer.

It can be published in newsletters, magazines and journals, or passed to other publications as background information. If you are making any changes they should be checked with the WCPT Secretariat info@wcpt.org.

In 2011 a high level meeting of world leaders at the United Nations recognised that non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer) are an increasing global health challenge. They claim 35 million lives a year – around 60 per cent of deaths.

For physical therapists, the official recognition that a global strategy is required to reduce this burden of disability and deaths is significant. Physical therapists help millions of people every year prevent these conditions and their risk factors – most importantly obesity. They also manage their effects, along with the effects of aging, illness, accidents, and the stresses and strains of life.

Physical therapists specialise in human movement and physical activity, promoting health, fitness, and wellness. They identify physical impairments, activity limitations, and disabilities that prevent people from being as active and independent as they might be, and then they find ways of overcoming them. They maximise people’s movement potential.

So when the World Health Organization points out that physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for global mortality, causing 3.2 million deaths annually, and that physical activity can reduce non-communicable diseases, it is clear that the profession has a major part to play.

Many people do not recognise the contribution physical therapists make in keeping people healthy and independent. On World Physical Therapy Day on 8th September, physical therapists have the opportunity to draw attention to their all important roles. I conduct workshops around the world, demonstrating how adults with chronic health problems can improve their health by learning how to exercise safely under the guidance and instruction of physical therapists.
Activity has to be introduced carefully if a person is overweight, unfit, older, or has a chronic disease. Physical therapists do this by examining the person, recommending exercises that are safe and appropriate for them, and educating them about how to look for signs of trouble.

Physical therapy doesn’t just mean more healthy people, but more productive people who can contribute to countries’ economies. Physical therapists’ services are provided in an atmosphere of trust and respect for human dignity and underpinned by sound clinical reasoning and scientific evidence.

These are important messages that physical therapists want to convey to the world every day, but especially on World Physical Therapy Day. The message is clear: physical therapists are movement, physical activity, and exercise experts and a resource in the battle against non-communicable disease that should never be overlooked.

Marilyn Moffat, WCPT President

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