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UK physiotherapists first in the world to prescribe medicines independently after campaigning by CSP

Physiotherapists in the UK are to be given new responsibilities to independently prescribe medicines to their patients, in a ground-breaking change to their role to be announced today, which follows lengthy campaigning by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP).

The announcement by Earl Howe on Tuesday 24 July, will confirm that once suitably trained, advanced practice physiotherapists in the UK will be the first in the world to be able to independently prescribe medicines without a doctor authorising their decision.

The extension to the role of physiotherapists, which comes after 10 years campaigning by the CSP and extensive consultation by the Department of Health, allows physiotherapists to prescribe any licensed medicine and to also mix medicines prior to administration. This means physiotherapists will have similar prescribing responsibilities to those of other non-medical professionals, like nurses and pharmacists.

The development is greatly welcomed by the CSP, as the Society believes it will lead to major improvements in care, with patients being offered quicker and more direct access to the medicines and treatment they need. Physiotherapists believe the opportunity to prescribe pain relief and other medicines will also help many patients respond more quickly to their physiotherapy, leading to faster improvements in movement, performance and function.

Under the plans, physiotherapists will now be able to prescribe medicines relevant to their scope of practice, for a wide range of illnesses such as respiratory diseases like asthma, neurological disorders, rheumatological conditions, women's health issues as well as for chronic pain and mobility problems.

Dr Helena Johnson, chair of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, said:

`Giving physiotherapists the opportunity to prescribe independently will hugely improve the care we can provide in the future.

`Patients will now receive a more streamlined and efficient service, meaning they get the medicines they need more immediately. A layer of bureaucracy will also now disappear and an unnecessary burden will be removed from doctors, with physiotherapists taking full responsibility and accountability for the prescribing decisions they make. For patients, the chance of faster relief from pain or other

symptoms will also mean many can benefit more quickly from their physiotherapy treatment.

'While some physiotherapists have practiced as supplementary prescribers since 2005, the move to full independent prescribing responsibilities marks a landmark in healthcare provision. The added autonomy given to physiotherapists in today's announcement is also greatly welcomed by the profession as a whole. It recognises the existing ability of physiotherapists to assess, diagnose and treat their patients to a high standard and acknowledges the clinical expertise and skill demanded of physiotherapists to provide quality healthcare.'

Physiotherapists currently working as supplementary prescribers have observed huge benefits, with their patients experiencing less painful episodes, quicker treatment and faster recovery. However, many have been frustrated that despite being able to prescribe medicines, their patients experienced delays in receiving medicines whilst waiting for a prescription.

In addition to reducing bureaucracy, the CSP believes the new development will also relieve an unnecessary burden on doctors who have been expected to write a prescription for medicines suggested by physiotherapists.

In order to qualify as an independent prescriber, physiotherapists will need to demonstrate a high level of expertise and only those who work in an advanced practitioner role will be able to take on the new responsibilities. Those that are eligible will need to undergo additional training or a conversion course and it is anticipated the first physiotherapists to independently prescribe will be treating patients by 2014.

****ENDS****

For further media information or to arrange an interview, please call the CSP press office on 020 7306 1111, email pressoffice@csp.org.uk. Out of hours please call Becca Bryant, head of press and PR (job-share) on 079172 40819, Jon Ryan, media and PR officer on 07917 091200 or Paul Marston, media and PR officer, on 07966 994141.

Notes for Editors:

1. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy is the UK's professional, educational and trade union body with more than 51,000 members, including chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.
2. The Medicines Act 1968 governs the use of medicines and applies UK wide. Changes to the Medicines Act 1968 require concurrent changes to NHS Regulations to take place in NHS settings. The provision of NHS services has been a devolved power since 1999. The Government plans to introduce simultaneous changes to NHS Regulations to allow independent prescribing by physiotherapists in NHS settings in England. The devolved Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will determine how and whether to take forward changes to their NHS Regulations.
3. Physiotherapists have been supplementary prescribers since 2005. This means they have been able to prescribe medicines in accordance with a clinical management plan agreed with a doctor.

4. The training programmes for independent and/or supplementary prescribers are multi-disciplinary, with nurses, pharmacists and in future physiotherapists learning together. The training programmes are 6 months in duration, with rigorous entry requirements and assessments covering both theory and learning in practice. Physiotherapists who are supplementary prescribers have an annotation on their Health Professions Council registration. Physiotherapists who independently prescribe medicines will also have a separate annotation on their registration as an Independent Prescriber.
5. In 1992 specially trained nurses were given the right to prescribe a range of medicines, including antibiotics for infections. Nurses gained independent prescribing rights in 2002, and were permitted to independently prescribe mixed medicines in 2009. Pharmacists gained independent prescribing rights in 2006, and were permitted to independently prescribe mixed medicines in 2009. Optometrists were granted independent prescribing rights in 2008.
6. Independent prescribing rights have also been granted to podiatrists as part of the government's announcement on 24 July 2012.
7. Physiotherapists are statutorily regulated by the Health Professions Council. They have been autonomous health professionals since 1977. Physiotherapists are able to assess, diagnose, treat and discharge their own patients. Physiotherapists may work as sole-practitioners or as part of multi-professional teams, but always communicate with patient's doctors to ensure patient safety.