Physical therapists as exercise experts across the life span

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) believes that with growing numbers of people leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles and that physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for non-communicable diseases leading to morbidity, disability and mortality, it is imperative that effective strategies for exercise across the lifespan are implemented. As experts in movement and exercise and with a thorough knowledge of risk factors and pathology and their effects on all systems, physical therapists are the ideal professionals to promote, guide, prescribe and manage exercise activities and efforts. Exercise promotes wellbeing and fitness. It is a powerful intervention for strength, power, endurance, flexibility, balance, relaxation, and the remediation of patho-physiology, impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Regular exercise also helps open up the potential of physical activity as a means of recreation.

To promote the role of physical therapists as exercise experts, WCPT encourages and supports member organisations to do the following.

- Assure a comprehensive knowledge base in physical therapist professional education, particularly regarding the examination/assessment and intervention/treatment of patients'/clients' exercise needs across the life span. This will be accomplished through, but not limited to:
  - the curriculum content on exercise and physical activity in all physical therapist entry level professional education programmes
  - inclusion in the curriculum of the multifaceted nature of physiological decline that occurs across the age span
  - educational materials about the unique opportunities physical therapists have to promote physical wellbeing for patients/clients through exercise
  - educational and practice resources about exercise for patients/clients
  - inclusion of evidence based exercise education programmes for patients/clients at WCPT, regional and national conferences
  - continuing education programmes on exercise prescription for patients/clients

- Support practice guidelines for safe and effective exercise parameters for patients/clients across the life span including:
  - guidelines for safe exercise programmes for patients/clients based on available evidence
  - guidelines for screening programmes (eg community, school, senior citizen programme) assessing exercise needs

- Enable consistent integration of the best evidence to support exercise across the life span by:
  - utilising existing databases and evidence-based literature on exercise for patients/clients
  - publicising funding sources for research on exercise programmes for patients/clients

- Educate professional communities about the role and benefits of physical therapists as exercise experts for patients/clients across the life span through:
  - information in professional publications on exercise for patients/clients
regional networking groups
raising awareness within the medical profession of the important role of physical therapists as exercise experts in the provision of exercise programmes for patients/clients
information exchange (eg websites, forums) between physical therapists on exercise for patients/clients

Educate consumer communities on the role and benefits of physical therapists as exercise experts for patients/clients across the life span through:

- coordinating communications strategies to inform the public
- providing resource materials (eg websites, brochures, interactive formats) for the public on the role of physical therapists in exercise programmes;
- establishing links with related organisations and groups (eg World Health Organization, schools, retired persons' groups, osteoporosis groups, diabetes foundations) to cooperate and develop common goals and promote the role of physical therapists as exercise experts for patients/clients

Glossary

Exercise — is a subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposeful in the sense that the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the objective. Physical activity includes exercise as well as other activities which involve bodily movement and are done as part of playing, working, active transportation, house chores and recreational activities. 3

Physical activity — is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. 3, 4

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References


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