

Physical therapists as exercise and physical activity experts across the life span

Policy statement

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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 and physical activity 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 physical activity and exercise activities and efforts.

Physical activity and exercise promote wellbeing and fitness and they are important contributing factors in the prevention and management of long-term conditions. They are powerful interventions for strength, power, endurance, flexibility, balance, relaxation, mental wellbeing, and the remediation of patho-physiology, pain, impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Physical therapists play a vital role in guiding and progressing safe and effective physical activity and exercise for those with long-term conditions, co-morbidities and those starting out on increasing their levels of physical activity and exercise.

To promote the role of physical therapists as exercise and physical activity 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 and physical activity 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 ^{1, 2}
 - inclusion in the curriculum of the multifaceted nature of physiological changes that occur across the age span
 - educational materials about the unique opportunities physical therapists have to promote physical and mental wellbeing for patients/clients through exercise
 - educational and practice resources about exercise and physical activity for patients/clients
 - inclusion of evidence based exercise education programmes for patient/clients at WCPT, regional and national conferences
 - continuing professional development opportunities 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, older people programmes) 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 and physical activity 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 and other health professions 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
- Establish the physical therapists role as a “train the trainer” for other professions working with exercise programmes to provide high quality services for the clients. Educate consumer communities on the role and benefits of physical therapists as exercise and physical activity 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 and activity 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 and physical activity experts for patients/clients.

Glossary (www.world.physio/resources/glossary)

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

Exercise

Physical activity

| Approval, review and related policy information | |
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| Date adopted: | Approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019 |
| Date for review: | 2023 |
| Related WCPT policies: | WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary health care • Education WCPT guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education • Guideline for physical therapists as exercise experts across the life span |

References

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapists as exercise experts across the life span. London, UK.: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/guidelines/exercise-programmes (Access date 20 Sept 2018)

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2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/guidelines/entry-level-education (Access date 20 Sept 2018)
 3. World Health Organization. Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO; 2010 [Available from: www.who.int/topics/physical_activity/en/. (Access date 20 Sept 2018)
 4. Caspersen CJ, Powell KE, Christensen GM. Physical activity, exercise, and physical fitness: definitions and distinctions for health-related research. Public Health Reports. 1985;100:126-31.

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