



SIERRA LEONE PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

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World Physiotherapy Day Event Report

World Physiotherapy Day 2026 Commemoration – Freetown, Sierra Leone

Date of event: Tuesday, 8th September 2026

Date of event: Reporting, 28th September 2026

Venue: 34 Military Hospital Conference Hall, Wilberforce

Theme: “cardiovascular disease and stroke – the role of physiotherapy and physical activity in their prevention, management, and rehabilitation”

Opening Proceedings

The event commenced at 8:00 a.m. with participant registration led by Deborah, Rebecca, and Mansaray. Guests and dignitaries arrived and were seated by 9:00 a.m. The program began with Muslim and Christian prayers, symbolizing unity and inclusivity.

Introduction of Chairperson and invited guests- Vice President SLPA

The Vice President of SLPA introduced the chairperson and invited guests, followed by a formal response from Colonel Hassan S. Kamara, who also served as Master of Ceremony. He started the Ceremony with a brief introductory statement with emphasis on discipline and professionalism as guiding principles for physiotherapists.

Welcome Address- SLPA President

The welcome address delivered by the President of the Sierra Leone Physiotherapy Association acknowledged the presence of the Ministry of Health, development partners, physiotherapists, patients, and students. The speech accentuated the global theme of cardiovascular health and stroke, highlighting the critical role of physiotherapists in prevention, rehabilitation, and restoring independence. A call was made to the Ministry of Health to integrate physiotherapy into primary healthcare and national strategies, stressing that investment in rehabilitation reduces hospital costs and strengthens the economy.

In his furtherance he remarked extended gratitude to development partners for their support in building institutional capacity, urging continued assistance in training, research and provision of infrastructure to meet the global and national challenges of care delivery. Students were encouraged to innovate and expand the boundaries of physiotherapy, while beneficiaries and patients were recognized as the true validation of the profession's impact. The address concluded with a unifying message: strengthening cardiovascular health and rehabilitation is essential for Sierra Leone's progress.

Statement from President of World Physio Africa Region via Video link

Banda Henry Opondo, the President of World Physiotherapy Africa Region, addressed the gathering in Sierra Leone on World Physiotherapy Day. He recognized officials from the Ministry of Health, universities, and the Sierra Leone Physiotherapy Association and conveyed greetings from the Africa Region. He explained that World Physiotherapy represents the profession globally and praised Sierra Leone as a strong member. He stated that this year's theme highlights the role of physiotherapy not only in rehabilitation but also in prevention and early intervention for cardiovascular disease and stroke. He criticized the existing health model that waits for illness before involving physiotherapy and urged Sierra Leone to adopt a new approach focusing on risk factors, screening, physical activity, behaviour change, prevention and rehabilitation. He concluded by thanking the association and partners, noting that their efforts enhance the visibility of physiotherapy and support its integration into primary health care and community services.

Key Addresses and Messages

- **WHO Representative:** Observed existing protocols and stressed the need for physiotherapy to be integrated into universal health coverage. He explained WHO's partnership with government institutions to improve policy, referrals, and accessibility, ensuring services extend beyond clinics.
 - **AHPC Registrar:** Emphasized the importance of professional registration with AHPC, describing it as both a liaison and protective body for practitioners.
 - **Stroke Survivor Testimony:** Shared a personal journey, underscoring the high cost of physiotherapy services and the importance of patient-specific goals. He commended Madam Emily (Vice President SLPA) for hard work and the display of the multidisciplinary team approach that professionals he had interfaced used to support him and other survivors.
 - **World Hope International (WHI):** Acknowledged distinguished guests and reaffirmed their commitment to physiotherapy education, inclusivity, and strengthening rehabilitation nationwide.
- Brigadier Dr. Sevallie (Surgeon General):** Praised physiotherapy leaders in Sierra Leone for addressing rehabilitation challenges in the armed forces. He shared international experiences and

announced plans for a neuro health center with physiotherapy integrated at every stage. He noted that orthopaedic and neurosurgery interventions are hampered without the involvement of a physiotherapist.

Keynote Address

Deputy Director of Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health (NCD-MH) delivered the keynote address. Stressing on physiotherapy transformative role in stroke rehabilitation as one that can never be underestimated he made it clear that stroke is a burden not only to Sierra Leone but to the world at large which makes it a major health concern. He linked his speech to the current Sierra Leone's Call to Action 2030 and the Primary Health Care Strategic Plan, highlighting governance, research, assistive technology, and sustainability. In the previous plans rehabilitation was never in the package but as of this current Call for Action and Primary Health Care Strategic Plan; rehabilitation has been embedded into the package to give professionals more opportunities and access to clients who need their services at community level believing that more people live with challenges in accessing therapy in the rural than the urban areas. He further admonished young professionals and upcoming professionals to do diligence in maintaining the values which their seniors have established and help promote the profession with professionalism and good behaviour with the reminder that "certificates qualify you, but discipline defines you."

Panel Discussion and Q&A

The panel featured SLPA leaders, stroke survivors, and health partners. The panel was moderated by the Deputy Director of NCD-MH; a physiotherapist himself and the first President of SLPA. Discussions centered on challenges, opportunities, and the future of physiotherapy on the theme; **"HOW DO YOU SEE STROKE REHAB SERVICE IN SIERRA LEONE"?**

Stroke Survivors Association President

The role of physiotherapist in the rehabilitation journey of stroke patient is very keen and it is the ultimate remedy but some of the challenges are: getting patient back to normal livelihood, high cost of accessing Physio treatment in some centres and absence of community physiotherapy services.

WHO

The need of physiotherapy is based on the fact that it is highly valuable in the prevention and recovery after stroke. He continued that this will be the reason why it should be available, affordable and accessible. Then WHO role play is always secondary to the government in providing support to the Ministry Health in developing guidelines, policies, technical support and financial support where applicable. They also help to assess gaps and support in developing plans to fill those gaps.

SLPA

The President of SLPA affirmed that stroke rehabilitation has improved reasonably owing to the fact that there has been a tangible increase in the number of trained and qualified physiotherapy professionals. As a result, rehabilitation centers have been either reinforced or created in strategic areas in the country. He mentioned among others the Bo Regional Rehabilitation Center, The Koidu Government Hospital Rehabilitation Unit, the Kenema Government Hospital Physiotherapy Unit, the Makeni Government Hospital Rehabilitation Unit, The National Rehabilitation Center, The Sierra Leone China – Friendship Hospital Physiotherapy Department, the Connaught Hospital Physiotherapy Department and the Arm Forces Physiotherapy Department.

He also mentioned that there are some private and semi-autonomous institutions that have physiotherapy units including Choithram Memorial Hospital and Life Care Hospital and the Emergency Hospital. He further noted that there are issues of accessibility and affordability in managing stroke in most centers. He craved for harmony and inclusivity (MDT approach) in management of stroke in all centers based in hospitals in order to promote early referrals even when the patient is in critically ill. He said that delay in referral may undermine prognosis in stroke.

Mr. “X”

In the narration of his journey after stroke, he highlighted the need for physiotherapy and impact with early intervention. He said he acquired stroke in 2018 which affected his mobility, speech and independence. He started therapy at the National Rehabilitation Center but had to move to the Sierra Leone – China Friend Hospital where he was supported to regain most of the lost function. He singled out the care and the experience he gained in the centers were worthy to his recovery and preferred situation. He encouraged stroke survivors to prioritize physiotherapy among other efforts because it stands as the best course of action leading to recovery. He strongly commended the professionalism of the physiotherapists in supporting individualised care in the centers he has interfaced with.

Laura Boothby, Occupational Therapist World Hope International

She started off by admonishing the room that in the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) there is no competition as everything should be focused on promoting client-cantered care, wellbeing and functioning back in society. It is for that reason that she stated that there are some similarities between Physiotherapy (PT) and Occupational Therapy (OT) but then each profession has its key differences which need to be understood and respected. She said that over time and with increase in workplace collaboration, the roles of PT and OT can be realised upon delivery of effective services. She stated that working together as members of the rehabilitation team will make health care delivery and prognosis much better for our patients.

Challenges

Mr. “X” a beneficiary of physiotherapy services however mentioned some challenges he faced including:

- Post stroke sexual activities which he said many stroke survivors shy to talk about.
- Difficulty with social integration
- Use of technology like Artificial Intelligence on advanced physiotherapy services

He demanded responses to some of these challenges from the professional point of view. In response the President of SLPA said that technology as stimulated an interesting progress in

rehabilitation; for instance. the use of AI was widely deliberated on during the recently completed World Physiotherapy (WP) Congress in Kigali in June 2026. The maintained that AI can never replace physiotherapists but in essence enhance service delivery by supporting the PTs in generating information that are consistent with the patient's condition. He said AI if currently used can support sound clinical decisions and support attainment of desired goals and objectives as stipulated by the PTs with respect to the patients' motivations and aspirations. He continued that the keen things PT's need to know is how to achieve individualised goals through thorough assessment and implementation of quality services. He concluded that AI will align PTs clinical decisions and intervention with evidence-based practice that are consistent with individual patient limitations.

Participants questions comments and Respond

Participant 1

He made contribution on the fact that physiotherapy plays an invaluable contribution in the rehabilitation of stroke and other patients living with disabilities. He encouraged that there is a compelling need to create more access especially in provincial area where stroke is being associated with spiritual belief citing his condition as a living example. He said it was not until he met a physiotherapist through Enable the Children Organisation that gave him access to some of these rehabilitation centres.

Participant 2 asked the following questions:

- How do patients know about Physiotherapy?
- To clinicians - where are your patient coming from?
- How can you the physiotherapists promote professional collaboration?

Participant 3 asked this question:

- What is the cause for second episode of stroke attack

Participant 4 made this contribution:

He advocated for inclusivity of transportation support due to the challenge stroke survivors are facing to go for treatment, as there is a growing burden in finance and transport or adaptive accessibility for stroke survivals.

The President of the Stroke survivors' response:

He said they learn about physiotherapy from there normal Dr's appointment in government facilities. He therefore stated that there is a need to create the awareness of physiotherapy widely especially in provincial areas where stroke is been spiritualised, delayed in referral and diverted to traditional healers. He supported that there are needs to increase proximity of service delivery, make the services reasonably affordable to all and at all levels of care. He encouraged SLPA to source fund from partners to support their work.

The moderator of the panel discussion responded:

He agreed with the utterances and presentations from the beneficiaries or patients but clearly pointed out that the Ministry of Health is tackling their numerous challenges working closely with the partners. He said the MoH will continue creating alliances with partners in the rehabilitation

sector by developing infrastructures, building professional capacity, starting up partnership advocacy, embracing effort and supporting people living with stroke among other forms of disabilities. He said, as a policy statement that he will look into the current charges or price tags in all the physiotherapy centres and ensure a revision of charges on patients because stroke rehabilitation may take reasonable time if not thorough out the lives of the survivors.

The President of SLPA supported the moderator by citing instances on the previously supported research studies on Assistive Technology which revealed the need to support rehabilitation and making rehabilitation and assistive products accessible and affordable. With regards the question on causes for second episode of stroke there may be various conditions leading to this including non-compliance with prescribed exercises, advice, medication, among others. He sustained that a PT who is monitoring the patient with stroke can play significant role in detecting patient resistance to antihypertensives and make referrals in time to avert any relapse. In his comment on the issue of delay and diversion he stated that this could be tackled through advocacy and lobby as well as meaningful engagement of family and community members of the survivor of stroke.

World Hope International Team: The WHI team physiotherapist, Celine presented on ‘guided workplace exercise, posture training’ with demonstrations on safe lifting to prevent musculoskeletal conditions.

Her presentation started off with emphasis that musculoskeletal (MSK) pain is the leading reason people stop moving, which undermines rehabilitation for cardiovascular disease and stroke. It was explained that 40–90% of physiotherapists experience work-related MSK symptoms, especially in the back and neck that is often triggered by manual patient handling and sustained stooping. The speaker noted that posture myths are misleading, stressing that no single posture prevents pain and that movement variety or frequent change of position is key. Demonstrations were given on practical techniques such as the hip hinge and safe two-person transfers without equipment. The use of the LITE framework (Load, Individual, Task, Environment) was introduced to assess risks. The session concluded with the message that there are no perfect postures, that teamwork and equipment are essential for injury prevention; also protecting the workforce is vital to sustaining rehabilitation.

SLPA Vice President: Spoke on “Improving Access to Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Services.”. She stated that Improving Access to Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Services in Sierra Leone was reported highlighting that physiotherapy is essential for recovery from injury, stroke, disability, and non-communicable diseases but yet access remains limited. It was explained that the country has only a few qualified physiotherapists, with services fragmented and existing physiotherapy facilities poorly resourced and/or staffed. The barriers were described as distance and transport costs, financial constraints, workforce shortages, and stigma toward disability. Opportunities were outlined, including decentralizing services, training and retention of staff, integrating rehabilitation into national health financing, improving coordination among stakeholders, expanding community-based rehabilitation, and promoting public education. The

message was concluded with the reminder that investing in physiotherapy means investing in people, as strengthening education, affordability, and community access will ensure Sierra Leoneans receive rehabilitation when needed.

Video statement pre-recorded by Monique Koopman (Member of the WP Africa Executive Committee)

This was an appropriately researched speech conducted to create awareness on the burden of stroke from global, continental, regional and national perspectives. She brought out the need to have put physiotherapist in the right frame of service by ensuring that they are present at the preventive, curative and rehabilitation phases of stroke management. The South African national appealed strongly to stakeholders: government, development partners, Disable People's Organisations, policy experts and health administrators to pay key attention to the role of physiotherapists in order to improve outcomes of stroke care, shorten hospital stay, reduce financial costs and ensure reasonable prognoses with amicable time. She laid emphasis on the mediocre concepts of referral to physiotherapists only during the moment of stroke pathology.

Recognition Award and Closing

Award: Special references were made in appreciation of the executive members of SLPA by the Master of event. The Deputy Director of NCD-MH, Dr Ismaila Kebbie was awarded a gift by SLPA for his outstanding contributions in the growth and development of physiotherapy and rehabilitation in Sierra Leone and his ascension to the creditable position of Deputy Director of NCD-MH of the MoH. He was impressed by this kind recognition and expressed his heartfelt gratitude.

Closing Remarks: Delivered by Colonel Kamara who served as Master of the program and a vote of thanks was delivered by a representative (BSc. Physiotherapy Student: Koffie Sankoh) from the Tonkolili District College of Health Sciences' Department of Physiotherapy.

Media Engagement: Sierra Leone Broadcast Corporation and other outlets conducted interviews, ensuring public awareness to inform the public upon a successful conduct of the WP 2026 commemoration.

Support to the provinces

The centres in Bo, Kenema, Kono and Makeni conducted their individual activities based on their contexts on the same theme. Banners and limited 'T' shirts were delivered to them from the SLPA office. Reports from these centers filtered in immediately after the celebration to highlight how this day was commemorated graciously in Sierra Leone.

Special Thanks and appreciation

SLPA was very appreciative of the following members of the association and other personalities for outstanding roles.

- ***Dr. Ismaila Kebbie*** – master of development of concept notes and activity plan, designer of colourful nature of ‘T’ shirts and banner, consultant, innovator and quiescent motivator/evaluator/adviser.
- ***Jesse Banguah*** – Ensured that printing of ‘T’ shirts was done according to expectation and played the role of pen-pusher, led team A in distribution of letters and supported printing of letters for distribution to partners, supported report after the activity. Played role in radio panel discussion before event. Responded to interview during the event.
- ***Abu Amara*** – Supervisor, strategist, thinker and followed up of events before during and after. Took responsibility of the conduct of affairs and participated in media interview during program.
- ***Emily Amara*** – mastered hiring of media expert and food vendor. Responded to media engagement during the event and accommodated executive in all the meetings before and after the event.
- ***Colonel Kamara, H.S.*** – masterminded the acquisition of the hall at no cost to SLPA, mobilize the military boss and his team to support the stage of the program, took over the role as Master of Program and a personal advisor.
- ***Celine Gunaratnam*** – supported with correspondences, fund raising and displayed sufficient resilience to give technical support and logistic support through the World Hope International.
- ***Dr. Henry Banda Opondo*** – WP Africa President supported SLPA by delivering a recorded speech directed at Sierra Leone and the theme of the year. Gave guidance on expectations and helped align celebration to our Africa context.
- ***Monique Koopman*** – Member of the WP Africa Executive Committee delivered a pre-recorded video message that was scientifically worded with current research information which was both motivating and advocacy message for recognition and inclusion of physiotherapy into the MoH and policy makers.
- ***The President of the Stroke Survivors Association (SSA) and clients living with stroke*** – The invitation letter to the President was never delivered but he nonetheless attended when contacted verbally through another member of the SSA. The presence of our esteemed beneficiaries helped us understand their day-to-day challenges. The testimonies were amazing and motivating for their peers, therapists, physiotherapy students and the public. Their questions, interaction, contributions and appreciation were what made the day a resounding success.
- ***Deborah Kumba Ngaujah*** – Distribution & follow up correspondences, printing of letters and attendance

- ***Samuel Mayah*** – Distribution & follow up correspondences, minute secretary during the event
- ***Rebecca Tholley*** – Distribution & follow up correspondences, locating favourable vendors for purchase and labelling of ‘T’ shirts.
- ***Mary M. Bangura*** – Head of unit, Kono led her team to commemorate the event, sent videos and narrative report from her side.
- ***Kadiatu Fornah*** – Head of unit, Kono led her team to celebrate WP 2026 in her location, forwarded pictures and videos as evidence.
- ***Martin Kamanda*** – Head of unit, Kenema who conducted his team to memorialize the event, sent videos and pictures as indication of activity.
- ***Prince Kailie, Maria and Saidu Sesay*** – Champions of coordinating the celebration at the Bo Regional Rehabilitation Centre. Videos and pectoral evidences were sent for knowledge of the team.
- ***Students of the Tonkolili District College of Health Sciences in Masanga*** –

key observations

Exceptional highlights

- Uniformity was good
- Food was well served
- Involvement of students was exceptional
- Venue was appropriate and optimally resourced with PA system, ACs, chairs, tables, lighting, limited noise production, very clean environment, good interaction among participants and unity among senior physiotherapy colleagues.

Areas of importance

- Registration /BP check of participants who gave consent, good timing and organisation
- Media negative obstruction, background screening unrelated to program, and unprompted activities.

Reflections and lessons learnt

- Planning should be ensured months before the activity. Activities should be set realistically and then plans for them with an associated timeline to ensure good timing.
- Advocacy for funds with partners should thus be sustained and followed up consistently. Documentation provided to partners to be concise with information on how to send funds clearly stated.

- SLPA should review their strategy before the end of the year and ensure planning for the event is included, in a timely manner.
- Advocacy for Hall should be done in time to make us get the type of hall we want. Strict timeframe limits to be set if, something is not confirmed by certain date, moving to the next option is vital and ensures to reduce the risk of delay.
- Individual members should financially contribute into funding the activities starting as soon as applicable. Members should be informed in advance and departments responsible to raise funds accordingly to size and ability.
- To throw attention on the challenges we must try to have a one-off activity where all professionals should converge at one point in the country. Likewise, consider activities throughout the week, beyond a single event gathering but promoting the day in communities and department sites.
- The launching of SLPA which was missed this year should happen in WP 2027
- Other partners must be encouraged to contribute and/or attend, they should be sent a summary of information or showcased the successful celebration. This would be to encourage donations in future years.

Conclusion

The celebration successfully ended at 1700hrs with a profound sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. Lessons were learnt and plans will be put in place for 2027 celebration. The contribution from WP Africa suggested that they have key interest in Sierra Leone. The keynote message delivered by the Deputy Director of NCD-MH was regarded as policy statement motivating the entire physiotherapy workforce. The integration of physiotherapy and rehabilitation into the Universal Health Coverage and the revelation of the progress in the employment of trained and qualified physiotherapy was very pleasing news to the association.

The presence of the physiotherapy students served as perceptible signal that reinforced their assurance that they are about belonging to a noble and interesting profession that will keep them contributing to humanity and complementing health to the poor and under-privileged. It aroused their resolution to place more effort into their academic work.

The interaction with stroke survivors/their care givers was remarkable and can further strengthen the bond between therapists and the people they are supposed to serve. The serene atmosphere promoted adequate confidence in carrying out all that happened. The messages were clear and as the media continue to propagate these messages over the period even outside the day's celebration more awareness is assured. These messages will be anchored to persuade policy makers to support physiotherapy institutions, their development and the beneficiaries of their services. It will further encourage them to understand the immeasurable roles of physiotherapists and have them placed in their right places at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of care.

Pictorial evidence of celebration



A well constituted hall and photos around the arena of the Forces Medical Services Hall in Wilberforce Barracks where the celebration of WP 2026 was celebrated in Freetown



Members of the Koidu Government Hospital Physiotherapy Department ready for the press



Members of the Makeni Government Hospital Physiotherapy Department were joined by a PT representative from the Masanga Government Hospital; they celebrated by delivering health talks and free blood pressure checks of patients and visitors within the hospital premises



Members of Bo Regional Rehabilitation Center in team with the Orthoprosthesis and support staff did sensitization activities to the patients who visited the centre. Testimonies given.



Members of Kenema Government Physiotherapy Unit made a show around hospital surroundings in team with patients and support staff on World Physiotherapy Day.

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