

April 2013

## Research by WCPT reveals global picture on direct access to physical therapy



**Research by WCPT has for the first time provided authoritative information about the extent to which patients can directly access physical therapists without referral by a third party. Papers based on the research have been published in the journals *Physiotherapy* and *Physical Therapy*, and are available to view as open access.**

In the research, 72 out of WCPT's 106 member organisations responded and 40 of these said that direct access and patient self-referral were permitted in their countries - either because it was permitted by legislation, or because professional practice allowed it in the absence of legislation.

Direct access to physical therapy, or self-referral as it is known in some countries, first occurred in Australia in the 1970s. WCPT believes it should be up to the profession in each country to decide whether to pursue direct access, in the context of their own educational standards.

"Progress across WCPT's member organisations has been varied, and the issue is now a high-profile advocacy issue for many," says Tracy Bury, WCPT's Director of Professional Policy.

"Some member organisations have already reaped the benefits of advocacy initiatives and legislative change, and many more strive to make the changes and are keen to learn from their international colleagues."

The research found that, of the 40 countries where direct access was permitted, 19 said it was available in both public and private settings and 17 said it was only available in private settings. Fifteen member organisations reported that direct access occurred in private settings even though it did not appear to be supported by legislation or professional practice.

Member organisations were asked whether physical therapy qualifying education equipped physical therapists for direct access. Sixty-nine percent

### What's inside this issue?

#### News

WCPT direct access research (p1)

Access to the profession (p3)

WCPT takes action on NCDs (p5)

Congress survey results (p7)

New regulation conference (p9)

#### Features

Emergency zone guidance (p10)

Evidence available to everyone (p12)

#### Subgroup News

New subgroup leaders forum (p14)

IFOMPT conference honoured (p15)

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

of respondents said that it did, and 31% said it did not.

"Although WCPT has produced guidelines for physical therapist entry level education, they remain aspirational for some WCPT members, while others exceed them," said Tracy Bury. "Education plays a vital part in equipping physical therapists with the requisite competencies to accept patients who self-refer."

Co-author Emma Stokes, WCPT's Vice President, said the study is the first global map of patient self-referral. "We now know that physical therapy professional autonomy is greater in countries where patients/clients can self-refer to physical therapists," she said. "In countries where physical therapists wish to move to direct access, they need to ensure that the physical therapy community is prepared educationally and professionally for the responsibility increased autonomy brings."

"The research provides information on barriers and facilitators and case studies on what assisted in moving the profession towards achieving patient/client self-referral and this information will be helpful, we hope, for member organisations' advocacy initiatives. Global data is helpful for negotiations with policy makers and also, possibly, insurance companies."

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- [WCPT's direct access paper in Physiotherapy journal](#)
- [WCPT's direct access paper in Physical Therapy journal](#)
- [Resources and information on direct access from WCPT](#)

April 2013

## WCPT promotes access to the profession for people with disabilities



WCPT is promoting access to physical therapy education for people with disabilities and supporting physical therapists with disabilities in practice through a new information-based project.

The Confederation wants to facilitate access to physical therapy professional entry level education by people with disabilities. It also wants to raise awareness about steps that can be taken to enable people with disabilities to continue practising as physical therapists, and help those who acquire disabilities to stay in the profession.

In a new project, prompted by a motion from the UK's Chartered Society of Physiotherapy at the WCPT General Meeting in June 2011, the Confederation aims to raise awareness, produce information and encourage good practice. A project advisory group to support the project on disability access to professional entry level education and practice has now been established.

The group will provide insight into the issues that should be taken into account, developing resources and the information needs of member organisations and physical therapists in relation to disability within the profession. It will also provide feedback on the resources that could be developed to meet information needs.

The project, and the advisory group, embrace all types of disabilities, including visual, physical and mental. It is being run in collaboration with Jennifer Audette and the DPT program from the Physical Therapy Department at the University of Rhode Island in the United States.

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

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- [Information and resources on disability from WCPT](#)



April 2013

## WCPT to highlight PT's unique contribution on NCDs at World Health Assembly



WCPT is highlighting the unique perspective of physical therapy in disability and non-communicable disease at the forthcoming World Health Assembly in May and meetings of international organisations associated with it.

At its meeting in March, the WCPT Executive Committee considered papers on disability and the role of physical therapy related to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), with a view to developing an action plan, which could include producing policy statements, briefing papers and congress programming.

"The aim of WCPT's work in these areas is to highlight the perspective of physical therapy and ensure key messages are delivered at relevant international meetings/events," says WCPT President Marilyn Moffat. "We want to convey our unique contribution: using evidence and science for the prescription of physical activity and exercise at levels of intensity which effect change for NCDs and most risk factors."

The World Health Assembly in May includes discussion on a draft resolution on disability, endorsing the recommendations of the World Report on Disability and calling for WHO and member states to ensure equal access to health services for persons with disabilities. WCPT is intending to make a statement welcoming the resolution, and supporting the need to redress the imbalance in access to health services experienced by people with disabilities.

The statement will encourage the use of physical therapists in national disability strategies and investment in the education of health professionals, so that people with disabilities receive high quality, evidence-based

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

services. It will emphasise the important role that physical therapists can play in collecting data on human functioning and informing policy and planning.

"Participation at the World Health Assembly, provides non-governmental organisations like WCPT with an opportunity to raise their profile and speak to issues on the agenda of particular concern to the profession," said WCPT Secretary General Brenda Myers.

During the week of the World Health Assembly, WCPT will also be meeting with the other members of the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) as well as the WHO Disability and Rehabilitation Team and its other partner organisations involved in rehabilitation services, disability and development.

## Related to this story

- [WCPT campaigning on NCDs](#)
- [The NCD campaign toolkit from WHPA](#)
- [Resources and information on NCDS from WCPT](#)

April 2013

## Survey ensures that the next WCPT Congress will meet delegates' wants and needs



WCPT has its finger on the hot topics that physical therapists want to hear about at the next WCPT Congress, to be held in Singapore in 2015. With the results back from its market research surveys, Aimée Stewart, Chair of the congress programme organising committee, says they will help ensure the event reflects physical therapists' wants and needs.

The surveys, which gained responses from 354 individual physical therapists and 16 member organisations, regions and subgroups, showed that musculoskeletal physical therapy, evidence based practice, the value of physical activity, continuing professional development and clinical guidelines were among the subjects most respondents wanted to be covered. Respondents said they would be attracted to congress by an interesting scientific programme, high profile speakers, networking opportunities and pre- and post- congress courses.

The survey results, which indicate a huge range of popular topics in all the congress programme tracks – professional practice, professional issues, education, global health and research methodology – will now inform decisions made about the congress programme made by its organising committee, the WCPT International Scientific Committee (ISC).

The ISC first met in December, and is already incorporating responses into plans for the congress programme. ISC Chair, Aimée Stewart, said that the committee, which represents a broad spectrum of the physical therapy community, is determined to give delegates a programme that is comprehensive, involving, diverse and interactive.

"It has to have broad appeal so that all physical therapists feel at home and

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

that their particular needs are being met as far as possible," says Aimée Stewart, who is Associate Professor at the University of Witwatersrand's Department of Physiotherapy. "It also needs to tackle head-on some of the problems the profession faces. The problems of lack of resources and overwhelming needs in under-resourced areas are as important as 'high tech' interventions in well-resourced units and will undoubtedly lead to lively debate and interactions among delegates."

The committee wants to build in opportunities for researchers, clinicians and others to interact and debate. There will be focused symposia with representatives from across WCPT's regions, and debates involving leaders and opinion-formers from all areas of the world. "These will provide the opportunity to consider clinical challenges and debate threats and opportunities," says Aimée Stewart. "How do we position ourselves in a health care sector with fewer and fewer resources? How do we face the challenges of the many disabled in the developing world where there are minimal human resources?"

The committee is considering ways of improving the profile and importance of poster presentations, with more interaction between poster presenters and delegates. It also wants to encourage and recognise young researchers who attend congress.

"To attend a WCPT Congress is a very rewarding experience and gives us the opportunity to meet, exchange ideas and realise how similar we all are even though some challenges may be different," says Aimée Stewart.

The WCPT Congress will be held in Singapore on 1st-4th May 2015.

## Related to this story

- [Details of the WCPT Congress 2015](#)

April 2013

## Major new event on health professions regulation



WCPT is among the global health professional bodies organising an international conference on health professional regulation, to be held on 17th-18th May 2014.

The Third World Health Professions Conference on Regulation will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, and will provide insight into current challenges facing health professional regulation, and how to overcome them.

The conference is being hosted by the World Health Professions Alliance, of which WCPT is a partner, and will run over 1.5 days. This is the third such event, after successful WHPA regulatory conferences in 2008 and 2010.

Key speakers will explore the lessons learned from competence-based approaches to regulation and examine best practice in regulatory governance.

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- [WCPT's resources on professional regulation](#)

April 2013

## Significant new guidance on physical therapists' responsibilities in emergency zones



**What are the responsibilities of physical therapists involved in emergency zones? New plain-language guidance from the International Committee of the Red Cross sets out the rights and responsibilities of health personnel in conflict and other situations of danger. It has been welcomed by physical therapists who specialise in this area.**

The document deals with some of the issues that arise when providing health care to people who are wounded or sick as a result of having been involved in armed conflicts or other emergencies. It covers

- the protection of health personnel, the sick and the wounded
- standards of practice
- the health needs of particularly vulnerable people
- health records
- imported health care (including military health care)
- data gathering and health personnel as witnesses to violations of international law
- working with the media.

According to Pete Skelton, a British physiotherapist who has worked in emergency situations in Haiti, the Middle East and Africa, this is a significant update for physical therapists, because it is framed in the context of humanitarian law and human rights law, taking into consideration the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

"There is a move away from 'medical ethics' towards 'health care ethics' with specific references to physiotherapists and rehabilitation," he says.

Of particular relevance to physical therapists is a section on health care for people with particular vulnerabilities, which outlines the need to address access to health care and rehabilitation for people with disabilities, he says. The report also addresses issues around importing health care, which have relevance for physical therapists when considering the provision of locally appropriate wheelchairs or prosthetics.

"It also addresses an issue which frequently proves challenging for physiotherapists during emergencies – the responsibility of all health professionals to keep accurate records," says Pete Skelton. "Time and again rehabilitation in conflict and emergencies can be hindered either by a lack of appropriate medical records or by physiotherapists themselves failing to document interventions appropriately due to time constraints. Emphasising our responsibility to maintain appropriate records, even in an emergency, is invaluable."

Barbara Rau, who is responsible for physical therapy within the physical rehabilitation department of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said physical therapists should use such guidelines, and those published by organisations such as WCPT, the World Health Organization and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), and periodically review their performance to guarantee optimal quality of care.

"Physical therapists and other health care professionals have important responsibilities in emergency situations while giving special attention to women, children, elderly people and people with disabilities – indeed, they are experts for these specific populations," she said.

"They are delivering services within a team of health professionals whose structure and organisation might be more challenging than the usual hospital or rehabilitation-based interdisciplinary team."

"In providing effective and impartial health care, physical therapists have rights (based on humanitarian rights law) and responsibilities, the first one being to look after oneself. Other responsibilities are that they offer, given constraints and if security is provided, an appropriate standard of care – meaning that they use adequate material and technology, and apply professional knowledge and expertise within a relationship of trust."

WCPT provides a range of resources and guidance for physical therapists working in disaster zones or emergency situations.

"Physical therapists working or interested in working in disaster zones should be aware of WCPT policy statements that apply to practice in emergency response situations, such as those on disaster management, ethical responsibilities, patients'/clients' rights and the consequences of armed violence, landmines and other weapons of war," said Catherine Sykes, WCPT's Professional Policy Consultant.

## Related to this story

- [Resources on disaster management from WCPT](#)
- [Download the ICRC document on rights and responsibilities of health care personnel](#)



# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

## Physical therapists now have the evidence at their fingertips – for free



The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) has made its Hooked on Evidence resource available to all physical therapists. The database now joins an array of freely available online resources about the evidence behind interventions that are specific to physical therapy.

The Hooked on Evidence resource includes extracts of articles related to physical therapy interventions that have been entered into the database by volunteer contributors. It is the APTA's "grassroots" effort to develop a database on current research evidence on the effectiveness of physical therapy interventions – prompted by a concern that clinicians lacked access to the knowledge available from current research, hindering evidence based practice (EBP).

This database now joins PEDro (the Physiotherapy Evidence Database), produced by the Centre of Evidence-Based Physiotherapy at the George Institute for Global Health in Australia, as a free EBP resource for all physical therapists to use. PEDro contains details of over 23,000 randomised trials, systematic reviews and clinical practice guidelines in physiotherapy, independently assessed for quality. Quality ratings are used to guide users to trials that are more likely to be valid.

There are a wide range of other online resources for making research available and promoting evidence based practice, all of which can be accessed through the WCPT website at [www.wcpt.org/ebp](http://www.wcpt.org/ebp)

Tracy Bury, WCPT's Director of Professional Policy, points out that whereas 20 years ago it took some digging for physical therapists to find evidence on which to base their practice, there are now many free and easily accessed resources available to help them identify effective interventions.



# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

"The amount of information available now is much better, but that can also be daunting," she says. "You have to find the resources that are most reliable, effective and easy to use within your day to day practice."

There are now modern wikis such as Physiopedia available, alongside databases of quality assessed evidence, and comprehensive but non-reviewed resources.

"All of them offer something slightly different," says Tracy Bury. "We need to be able to access the right ones at the right time, aware of what they can do and what their limitations are. Evidence based practice is at the heart of what we do, so this increasing accessibility wherever we practise or study is extremely important."

## Related to this story

- [Access Hooked on Evidence](#)
- [Access PEDro](#)
- [WCPT's information resource on evidence based practice](#)

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

## New initiative for WCPT subgroups



Subgroup forum

**WCPT held its first ever Leadership Forum for representatives of its subgroups on 10th-11th March. Bringing together subgroup leaders with the WCPT Executive Committee, members of the WCPT Secretariat and organisations aspiring to be subgroups, the meeting examined ways in which the organisations could move forward together through collaboration and information sharing.**

"All of WCPT's subgroups share WCPT's vision of moving physical therapy forward so that the profession is recognised globally for its significant role in improving health and wellbeing," said Tracy Bury, WCPT's Director of Professional Policy, who organised the meeting, held at the WCPT Secretariat in London. "Sharing knowledge and experiences along with maximising opportunities for collaborative working are keys to success."

The response from participants to this breakthrough event has been positive. "The forum was an excellent event, giving a very clear picture of WCPT expectations for subgroups with lots of helpful examples of what's worked and what's not been so good," said Nicola Hunter, of the International Federation of Physical Therapists working in Occupational Health and Ergonomics, an international group working towards recognition as a WCPT subgroup.

"I came away very impressed with the professionalism of WCPT. I have lots of useful information and tips to feed back to my colleagues."

WCPT subgroups are independent international organisations for physical therapists with a specific area of interest, which have met specific requirements to be recognised as a WCPT subgroup. They promote the advancement of physical therapy and exchange of scientific knowledge in their field.

For more information go to the WCPT subgroups page at  
[www.wcpt.org/subgroups](http://www.wcpt.org/subgroups)

April 2013

## Subgroup honoured for its conference success



The International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists (IFOMPT) – a subgroup of WCPT – has received official recognition for its last conference, held in Quebec City, Canada in 2012.

It was judged international event of the year in Quebec City by the city's tourism body. The award was presented at a banquet in January. Elaine Maheu, IFOMPT conference co-chair, says the conference generated \$3.2 million for the Quebec tourism industry.

"I share this honour will all those who contributed to the success of this conference," said Elaine Maheu, IFOMPT conference co-chair. "It was worth every minute, hour and day that we spent putting this great event together."

### Related to this story

- [IFOMPT's website](#)
- [Information about IFOMPT, a WCPT subgroup](#)

# WCPT NEWS

April 2013

