

# Awareness of Physical Therapy Among General Practitioners in Hyderabad, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To find out the awareness of physical therapy services and practices among general practitioners in Hyderabad, Pakistan

**Study Design:** Cross sectional study.

**Place and Duration:** Different hospitals and private clinics of General Practitioners in Hyderabad during the months of July 2013 to September 2013.

**Material and Methods:** 100 General Practitioners were selected through convenience sampling. Both male and female General practitioners (GPs) above the age of 25 years having a valid PMDC (Pakistan medical and Dental Council) registration were included in the study. A self-administered, closed ended questionnaire was used to collect the data. The responses of the participants were analyzed through descriptive statistics by using SPSS version 20.

**Results:** Results revealed that GPs knowledge was inadequate regarding some conditions treated by physical therapists such as incontinence, headache, heart problems, ante and postnatal conditions and burn management as around 70% GPs thought that physical therapists have 'no role' in treatment of these conditions. However, 96% GPs responded that physical therapists have major role in treating musculoskeletal conditions. More than 60% GPs thought that physical therapist cannot do plastering and suctioning effectively. However, more than 80% of GPs believed that physical therapists do electrotherapy, heat/cold and manual techniques effectively.

**Conclusion:** The awareness of GPs is not sufficient as majority of them were unaware regarding attributes of physical therapists such as qualification and involvement of physical therapists in new and advanced research. Most of them thought that physical therapists have no role in treating incontinence, headache, heart problems, ante and postnatal conditions and burn management. It is recommended that there should be seminars, workshops and professional gatherings among GPs and physical therapists to enhance the knowledge of physical therapy.

**Key Words:** Awareness, Physical Therapist, General Practitioner, Management.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Inter-professional collaboration within healthcare team is now considered as an effective way of the best delivery of health care services. This collaboration of different healthcare specialists can be employed effectively by considering each professional as an important team member and how effective their skills may be for the betterment of a client.<sup>1</sup> Physical therapists have very important role in a health care team.<sup>3,15</sup> Medical professionals have not sufficient awareness of physical therapy services or how physical therapy can help their patients.<sup>2</sup>

Patients also have shown dissatisfaction with their general physician's lack of knowledge of the physical therapy services and availability of alternative treatments.<sup>3</sup> First interaction of the patients is almost always with general physicians. If patient needs, the General Physician have to refer the patients to the specialized healthcare professional for effective and more suitable treatment option.<sup>2</sup>

Physical therapy is an independent treatment specialty which has the physical means of treating the patients suffering from different diseases. It deals with the treatment by natural sources based on movement, manual therapy and physical agents to relieve pain, to prevent deformities, to promote healing, to achieve, maintain and restore maximal physical functioning and health throughout life.<sup>4,5</sup> Physical therapists are experts in movement science who are important members of health care team. Using their professional knowledge and skills, physical therapists interact with individuals to achieve goals customized to accomplish highest level of physical function of their clients. In addition physical therapists are also involved in the promotion of health and wellness, prevention of physical dysfunction and disability, and public health initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

A general practitioner (GP) is a medical professional who delivers complete general care to patients. A general practitioner does not focus on specific medical conditions only but he can provide basic treatment for almost all the medical conditions.<sup>6</sup> Usually patients seek a GP for their primary care and the GPs are usually the first point of contact with the medical system for patients. GPs usually provide their services in primary care healthcare centers where they play a central role in the healthcare team and in their personal set-ups or clinics.<sup>6</sup>

Aim of this study was to evaluate the level of awareness among general practitioners in Hyderabad, so that further awareness may be created in general practitioners. Many studies and researches have been conducted for this purpose in different countries in different kind of populations like in general population, patients and medical

students.<sup>1,7-10</sup> Awareness of GPs regarding physical therapy must be efficient to minimize bad impact of profession among people and to create more positive attitude of medical professionals towards physical therapy. Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the knowledge of general practitioners regarding physical therapy in Hyderabad Pakistan.

## MATERIAL & METHODS:

A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted to assess the participants' awareness regarding physical therapy. Different hospitals and private clinics of general practitioners were visited to collect data during July 2013 to September 2013. For this study, 100 general practitioners from Hyderabad city were selected through convenience sampling. Both male and female general practitioners above the age of 25 years having a valid PMDC (Pakistan Medical and Dental Council) registration were included in the study. Doctors having a particular specialty were excluded from the study.

A pretested, self-administered, closed ended questionnaire was used to collect the data. The respondents were informed about the details of study through consent form, provided them before the questionnaire. The responses of the participants were analyzed through descriptive statistics by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

## RESULTS:

Among 100 General Practitioners (GPs) 67 were males and 33 females. Majority of the participants were in the age range of 25 to 35 Years (77%) and 89% of the participants had experience of 1 to 10 years. (Table.1)

While asking the question regarding attributes of physical therapist (Table.2) only 25% respondents thought that the physical therapists are well qualified 4% disagreed to this statement and 13% didn't know about the qualification of physical therapists. 16% GPs agreed that physical therapists are mainly interested in making money. While asking that physical therapists offer effective treatment to their patients or clients, only

17 GPs agreed and 12 GPs disagreed. In response to a statement that the physical therapists are involved in new and innovative research, only 8% GPs agreed, 17 GPs disagreed and 35 did not know about it.

Figure 1 shows that participants possess high degree of awareness regarding the role of physical therapist in some conditions such as Musculoskeletal conditions (96%), Stroke (88%), Postural Problems (90%) and they have comparatively low awareness in some conditions as they answered no role of physical therapist in Heart Problems (77%), Headache (77%), Urinary Incontinence (69%) and Burns (56%).

Respondents were also asked about the effectiveness of treatment or services provided by the physical therapist. Respondents were not well known to some treatments provided by physical therapists such as Plastering (66%), Suctioning (62%), Hydrotherapy (35%) and Traction (31%). While the GPs were well aware about some treatments provided effectively by physical therapists like Manual techniques (92%), Electrotherapy (84%) and Heat/Cold therapy (74%). (Figure. 2)

**Table-1: Demographic**

Demographic Variable	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Male	67	67
Female	33	33
Total	100	100
Age		
25-35 years	77	77
36-45 years	22	22
>45 years	1	1
Total	100	100
Experience		
1-10 years	89	89
11-20 years	9	9
>20 years	2	2
Total	100	100

## DISCUSSION:

The level of awareness and understanding about Physical Therapy and physical therapy services or treatment among GPs is necessary to find out the conditions which are mainly and effectively treated by physical therapist.

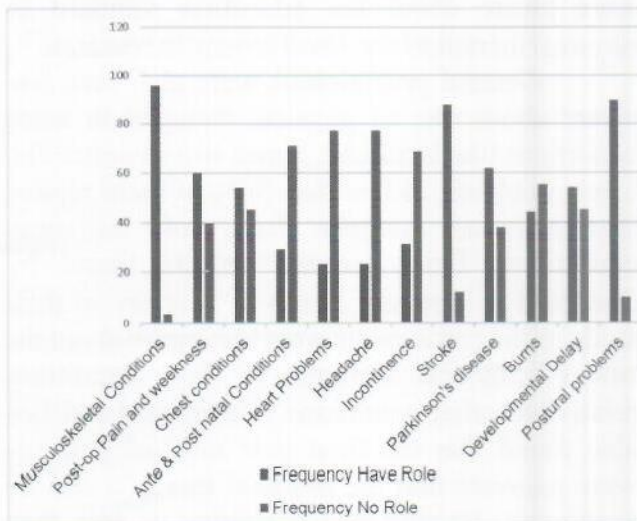
The findings of our study exposes that the level of awareness of physical therapy among GPs in Hyderabad is not much enough as some questions reveal poor response from GPs. GPs did not know very well about some attributes of physical therapists like education (25%) and involvement in research (8%). Similarly, Parti and Liu in their study found that less than 40% students were aware about the education standard of physical therapists and involvement in research.<sup>11</sup>

General practitioners were also very less aware about role of physical therapist in some conditions like headache, burns, incontinence and heart problems, as less than 50% of them replied that physical therapist have role in these conditions. Fairly similar results found by Sheppard & Lee and James & Murphy in their study as the participants were less aware about the role of physical therapist in these conditions relative to other conditions.<sup>1,12</sup> Sheppard and Lee also found that the final year medical students were unaware that the physical therapist can do suctioning, traction and plastering as less than 40% of them were aware about that.<sup>1</sup> Similar results were observed in our study as the response of GPs were plastering 34%, suctioning 38% and traction 68%.

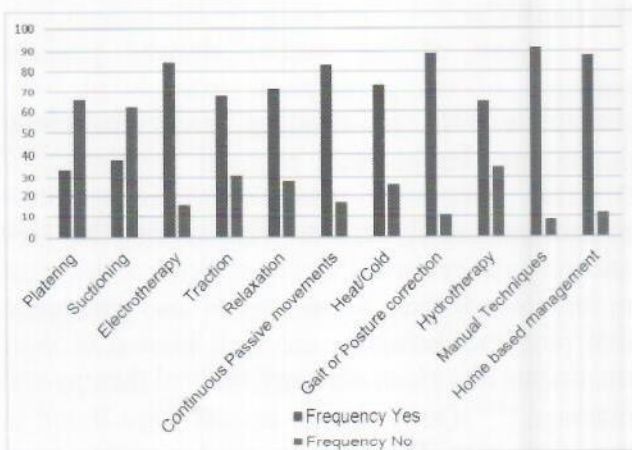
Most of the studies showed positive response of the participants towards physical therapists role in treating musculoskeletal conditions, stroke and postural problems.<sup>1,12-14</sup> Similar response was found in general practitioners of Hyderabad. This reveals that GPs are more aware about the role of physical therapist in these conditions. Some studies also concluded that physical therapists are well known in their treatments like electrotherapy, manual therapy and massage.<sup>1,13,14</sup> Quite similar results were found in our study also. We found a good response from some general practitioners as they believed that physical therapists can treat some conditions

**Table-2: Attributes of Physical Therapist**

Physical Therapists are	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Readily available to doctors	19	67	4	10
Well qualified	25	58	4	13
Very caring to patients or clients	21	54	6	19
Mainly interested in making money	16	19	26	39
Offer effective treatment to their clients or patients	17	68	2	13
Involved in new and innovative scientific research	8	40	17	35



**Figure 1. Role of Physical therapist in treating different conditions**



**Figure 2. Treatments or services provided by physical therapist**

effectively and they also said that they refer the patients to physical therapist for those conditions. But still there is need of creating awareness of physical therapy in general practitioners as almost 50% of them were not aware completely about the physical therapy.<sup>13-15</sup>

This study has certain limitations as the sample reflects the response of general practitioners from Hyderabad only and our sample size was small. The study should be conducted throughout the country with large sample size. We recommend that there should be more research in other cities and throughout the Pakistan to reveal the areas of less awareness among GPs. It is also recommended that there should be seminars, workshops and professional gatherings among GPs and physical therapists to enhance the knowledge of physical therapy.

**CONCLUSION:**

The results revealed good response from the participants but in some questions and points GPs need to be more aware regarding physical therapy services. Majority of GPs in Hyderabad were unaware regarding attributes of physical therapists such as qualification and involvement of physical therapists in new and advanced research. GPs were also not much aware regarding some conditions treated by physical therapists as they did not prefer physical therapists for referral in conditions such as incontinence, headache and chest problems. GPs showed good response regarding the role of physical therapists in treating musculoskeletal conditions, stroke and postural problems.

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