

ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS TOWARDS THEIR CHOSEN CAREER

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ABSTRACT

Background: Physiotherapy is a physical medicine and rehabilitation specialty that remediates impairments and promotes mobility, function and quality of life through examination, diagnosis, prognosis, and physical intervention. In this study, attitudes & perceptions of students pursuing their Bachelors in Physiotherapy in two urban cities of Maharashtra have been studied and their views regarding choosing physiotherapy as a career highlighted; as they are the best ones to judge this rather than other professionals doing it for them. There is no doubt that Physiotherapy as a course, career and even as a profession is scaling new heights & reaching peaks.

Aims & Objectives: This study sought to assess the attitude and beliefs of Bachelors of PT students regarding the future of their profession in India.

Study design: Questionnaire based survey

Methodology: A self prepared questionnaire & Google docs format of the questionnaire was distributed to 9 Physiotherapy colleges in Pune & Mumbai. The sample size was 737. The questionnaire consisted of 14 single best response MCQs.

Results: After analyzing the data received, it was seen that 87% students decided to study physiotherapy after their low medical entrance exam scores. 76% also sought advice from professional career counselors before choosing PT. Students also believed that this field has its disadvantages and not many were aware about the job opportunities in & around their state. Students appeared to have a mixed opinion about whether licensing exam should be compulsory before practicing physiotherapy in India.

Conclusion: Awareness about physiotherapy as a career is increasing but still needs to be worked upon mainly at school levels and amongst the general population. Job opportunities in the private, as well as the government sectors, needs a boost. The disadvantages of this field have to be considered and rectified.

KEYWORDS: attitude; physiotherapy students; perception; career

INTRODUCTION

The history of physiotherapy or physical therapy can be traced back to ancient Greece in the era of Hippocrates¹.

'Physiotherapy' is a branch of modern medical science which includes examination, assessment, interpretation, physical diagnosis, planning and execution of treatment and advice to any person for the purpose of preventing, correcting, alleviating and limiting dysfunction, including life saving measures via chest physiotherapy in the intensive care unit, curing physical disorders or disability, promoting physical fitness, facilitating healing and pain relief using physical agents, and devices including exercise, mobilization, manipulations, therapeutic ultrasound, electrical and thermal agents and electrotherapy for diagnosis, treatment and prevention².

'Physiotherapist' is a qualified professional who has acquired all the above mentioned knowledge and skills for entry into

practice after being awarded a bachelor degree in the subject of "Physiotherapy"². In the modern world, due to mechanization and sedentary lifestyles, people are facing a variety of muscular, skeletal, neurological and cardiovascular problems.

Physiotherapy works wonderfully & efficiently in managing the above problems & rehabilitating people back to their functional status.

Physiotherapy is a health profession, concerned with maximization of mobility and quality of life by implementing clinical reasoning³.

As various health centers, fitness centers, wellness centers, etc are coming up big way, prospects of careers in physiotherapy seem positive³.

Making a career in physiotherapy is a wise decision as the scope it covers is widening up and expected to offer numerous jobs options³. Most of the future physiotherapists, seem to be unsure of why they took up this course and aren't even aware of the extent of scope ahead of them in this chosen field. Research is, therefore, required in this arena so as to explore & bring to

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light the attitude of the future generation of physiotherapists about their career of choice which is the need of the hour.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A self prepared, questionnaire that had 14 MCQs was made & Institutional Ethical committee approval obtained for the research design. Hard copies & a Google docs. format of this questionnaire was circulated to 9 Physiotherapy colleges in Pune & Mumbai. The total number of respondents was 737, making this the sample size. Informed written consent was taken from the students & were asked to select the single best option while answering the questions

Selection and description of participants: Selection of the participants was done by purposive sampling. The inclusion criterion was students pursuing their Bachelor's of Physiotherapy (including Interns).

Statistical methods: Descriptive analysis was done of the data received in Microsoft excel 2007.

RESULTS

Q1) When did you decide to take up Physiotherapy?	87.6% decided to take it up after giving their entrance exams and 0.1% decided in their secondary school
Q2) Why did you decide to take up Physiotherapy?	84.6% decided after they did not get into other medical fields and 0.4% thought it was a lucrative profession.
Q3) Did you seek advice before taking up Physiotherapy?	98% replied positively
Q4) Did you seek advice about which college to go to?	98% said yes
Q5) Whom did u seek advice from regarding taking up Physiotherapy?	76% consulted professional counselors and 0.68% the internet.
Q6) Are you familiar with employment opportunities in your country?	41% were and 58% weren't aware.
Q7) According to you, work of a physiotherapist is...	53% believed PT is not appreciated in our country and only 1.2% considered it rewarding.
Q8) What can be achieved by working as a Physiotherapist?	21% believed it will give them social prestige and an equal no. hoped for a stable job.
Q9) What is the greatest disadvantage of working as a physiotherapist?	34% this to the disrespect by other medical professionals.
Q10) Finding a job would be easier if.....	38% believed a prestigious college would help and 23% thought that a masters degree is must
Q11) Future plans after finishing B.P.Th.?	24% wished to work in a polyclinic and 21% planned to work and study, simultaneously.
Q12) I believe that finding work as physiotherapist in my	63% disagreed

city is difficult.	
Q13) I believe that finding work as physiotherapist in other states of India is difficult.	57% disagreed
Q14) Should Licensing exam be started in every state in India?	43% gave a positive response as opposed to the 57% , who said NO.

DISCUSSION

Physiotherapy is a non surgical, non pharmacological way of pain management, where various techniques are employed to provide instant or gradual relief to the patients by total rehabilitation of body tissues and strengthening the muscles and joints³.

Job opportunities are also not as adequate as most hospitals don't employ qualified physiotherapists with specialization though patients requiring specific treatment protocols are in plenty. Further, job prospects in the government departments are also very poor for physiotherapists. Physiotherapists are much needed in the field of medical health as they can, in some cases, treat patients in a non-surgical way. But unfortunately awareness about physiotherapy is rather poor, especially in developing countries like India⁴.

The authors did not come across any survey analyzing the attitudes of physiotherapy students in the state of Maharashtra, the discussion in this paper will, therefore, mainly consist of a detailed analysis of the attitude of physiotherapy students in two urban cities in the state of Maharashtra towards their chosen career pertaining to practice of physiotherapy.

The State Universities accept scores of minimum 50% in the entrance tests as eligibility for admissions in the field of physiotherapy, and so students who do not score high enough to enter other medical fields, considered this as the last option, and they choose Physiotherapy after their entrance exam results.

Students when asked about when did they decide to take up physiotherapy, majority of students (i.e. 87%) decided on the basis of the scores of their entrance exams & when they (84%) did not score high enough for their field of choice. Very few (0.1%) students actually considered to take up physiotherapy as a career during their high school. This could probably be due to the lack of awareness of physiotherapy, a vocational option at school level.

Majority of the students (75%) did seek professional advice about choosing physiotherapy before giving their entrance tests and also about which college to go to and the remaining sought advice from their parents, relatives, doctors, practicing therapists and some even from the internet.

41% of the students in the present study were aware of the job opportunities in India but a good 58% weren't.

The students were asked what they thought Physiotherapy was, a shocking revelation was when 53% answered that it is a field not appreciated by all, although 20% did know that it is rehabilitative in nature. A mere 1.2% called the profession fashionable & rewarding.

The students were asked to pick an option as to which life's value did a physiotherapist achieve. There was a mixed bag of responses from the students. An equal number believed it helped the therapist in achieving social prestige & would provide them with a stable job, giving them financial stability; a few (12%) hoped that the profession will help them expand their knowledge.

Most of the students (34%) considered not being respected by the other healthcare professionals as a major disadvantage of the profession, another 18% considered the profession as time consuming as well as suffering from lack of awareness.

According to a survey done in 2014, 95.5% of doctors did refer their patients to physiotherapist, suggesting they do appreciate the profession and its need².

When students were asked regarding what would increase their job opportunities, 38% felt that a degree from a prestigious college would help, 15% felt, if one has the required knowledge and skills, it is sufficient enough to obtain a job, 23% believed that a post graduate degree would boost their careers.

Future plans after doing bachelors of physiotherapy has also obtained a mixed review from working in a polyclinic (25%), to studying further (22%), as well as working in a hospital (17%) and working along with studying (17%).

63% believed that obtaining a job as a physiotherapist in their hometown was difficult whereas 36% thought otherwise.

When asked about their views on job opportunities in different states of India other than their parent state, 42% believed it was easy to get jobs whereas 57% thought differently, which most likely could be due to lack of awareness of employment options across the country.

The students responded apprehensively to the question of starting licensing exam in the various states of India. Probably this was the reason why 49% of population said yes and 51% did not want to have any such entry level exams.

So overall from the present data, the fact that comes forth is that students need to be made aware about the immense scope that physiotherapy has to offer & that it is gaining

importance exponentially. This might help in decreasing the non-favourable view points of the future generations towards Physiotherapy as a future career. The government may need to intervene so as to change this attitudes & perceptions.

CONCLUSION

Awareness about physiotherapy as a career is increasing but still needs to be worked upon starting at the school level.

Awareness is also required in the general population as well the different Healthcare professionals as they also influence the stakeholders of physiotherapy, our dear students.

Job opportunities in private as well as government sectors needs a boost which will definitely help minimize the disadvantages in the field as perceived by the future generations

FUTURE SCOPE

Creating awareness among school & college going students is the need of the hour. As well as assessing the students' mindset in colleges in surrounding states.

Limitations of the study: Students of Physiotherapy colleges in interior areas of Maharashtra were not assessed.

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