



Editorial

Physical Therapy Degree Programms in Pakistan can be called a Development in the Profession

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The formal education of physical therapy in Pakistan started from 1955 with a two years diploma but later on converted to BSc PT in 1961 and then four years BS program in 1999. ^[1]There were only few institutes in the country till 2007 but with introduction of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) being the entry level degree, remarkable growth has been observed in terms of increased number of institutes and enrolled students in the DPT program. In the last 9 years now we have almost 60 physical therapy institutes. Hundreds of students will be graduating from these institutes in the next few years and will be looking for jobs.

The next question comes to mind do we have need for these professionals? If we look into the population of the country we have 185 million ^[2] and among them we have five million populations with physical and mental challenges, also we have 148 teaching hospitals including public and private sector hospitals ^[3]. One physical therapist can treat 8 to 10 patients a day because the average therapy session takes 35 to 45 minutes'. The total strength in the country approximately 2000 working therapists in the public and private sector institutes. According to the above mentioned statistics we have a dire need for physical therapists in the next decade. Like in other developing countries the physical therapy profession in Pakistan is not yet recognized in a true sense by the Government of Pakistan's health ministry as autonomous profession which is the main hurdle for the growth of the profession, that's why other health professionals including orthopedic, Neurologist and physiatrists considered it part of their practice. However it has been declared by world health Organization (WHO), United Kingdom (UK) and North America (USA & Canada) as autonomous profession. ^[4] In USA almost all states have direct access to physical therapists which means no physician's referral are required by law. The physical therapists are allowed to conduct EMG with few months of special training. In UK physical therapists are authorized for intra articular injection and recently also got permission for limited prescription including pain medication, allergy and muscle relaxants. They are also authorized to order lab tests and imaging. ^[5] All the military forces health departments of the united states allow physical therapists to prescribe certain medications and they also authorized to evaluate, diagnose and treat neuromuscular dysfunctions as non-physician primary health care provider since 19 94^[6]. It is a significant development in the profession internationally. This model could be beneficial for the armed forces health institutes in Pakistan too.

Another dilemma in Pakistan that all other health professional institutes run by the relevant professionals but the physical therapy institutes most of the time run by a non-physiotherapist. This is another hurdle for the growth of the profession. According to American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) "Physical therapists are health care professionals who maintain, restore, and improve movement, activity, and health enabling an individual to have optimal functioning and quality of life, while ensuring patient safety and

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applying evidence to provide efficient and effective care. Physical therapists evaluate, diagnose, and manage individuals of all ages who have impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.^{16,17}

Today the education standard of entry level degree in physical therapy is equivalent 17 years of schooling like other health professional degree programs e.g. MBBS and Pharm. D. and recognized by Higher Education of Pakistan (HEC). This entry level degree program has a very rich curriculum that enable the graduates to be competent enough to diagnose and treat variety of movement dysfunctions due to diseases and injuries. Furthermore at Riphah the academic council allowed the DPT graduates to peruse their M. Phil. and PhD in basic sciences (Anatomy and Physiology) and also in MSc. Pain Medicine which can be considered a significant development in the profession but on the other hand due to the absence of council/regulatory body many substandard programs also exist in the country which will affect the profession badly. The mushrooming can only be controlled by the GOVT authorities.

Another development currently we have that many institute offers now specialized programs e.g. MS OMPT, NMPT etc. but again due to lack of check and balance most of the post graduate programs are not up to international standards. The problem in Pakistan most of the time the institutes focus is on the nomenclature of the degree not on the curriculum that's why now a days we have many M. Phil. Programs. Although in the developed world (UK and North America) it is not a regular degree but awarded in some circumstances. So the education ladder to be in line with international standards after the entry level degree should be, post Graduate Diploma, MS and PhD/DSc. etc. We have few PhD programs in the country too but the dilemma is that after acquiring their PhD no one can be called a specialist in any area because their curriculum has not been designed for that purpose? It should be a concern of the professionals to pursue this issue with their institutes and make changes in the curriculum. The real development will be if we have advance knowledge and skills beneficial for the community. Although the professionals have many challenges in the country but when we compare the profession a decade back it could be claimed that there has been a significant development (75%) in terms of educational level, advancement in the clinical practice up to some extent, job opportunities and awareness in the public but much more work are needed to be done. So the conclusion is that, the advanced degree programs in physical therapy is considered to be development in the profession academically but on the same scale clinical development has not been done. The development in the clinical practice is very much needed otherwise the community will not be benefitted from the specialized skills of the physical therapists. In the future the focus should on the clinical setups and only those institutes will be successful if they have hospital's attachments where students can complete their clinical rotation and also complete their house job under supervision of the senior faculty.

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