

An evaluation of the paediatric physiotherapy curricula of three South African universities

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ABSTRACT

Paediatric rehabilitation is currently becoming an independent sub-discipline of physiotherapy (Helders *et al*, 2003). South Africa has a population pyramid resembling other developing countries with one-third of the population being children younger than 14 years (Saloojee & Pettifor, 2005). To date no national audit of paediatric content of physiotherapy programmes in South Africa has been conducted. The United States has spent almost 18 years on methods to ensure adequate content of paediatric physiotherapy and standardisation of training in programmes across the country.

The main aim of this study was to determine whether the paediatric physiotherapy curricula of three South African universities equipped students with the basic knowledge of the variety of paediatric diagnoses seen by physiotherapists at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital.

The study was divided into two phases. Phase 1 analysed paediatric diagnoses treated by physiotherapists at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in 2010. Phase 2 evaluated the content of the paediatric physiotherapy curricula of the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Limpopo and the University of Pretoria.

A retrospective review of the physiotherapy statistics at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital was used to record the types of diagnoses referred for paediatric physiotherapy assessment and treatment. The 2010 statistics of paediatric diagnoses referred for physiotherapy management at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital were as follows:

- Total number of patients seen by physiotherapists = 36490
- Total number of paediatric patients seen by physiotherapists = 8093
- Amount of time spent in treating all patients = 149331 hours
- Amount of time spent in treating paediatric patients = 33101 hours

More than a fifth of patients referred for physiotherapy intervention at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in 2010 were paediatric patients (22,03%). The large number of paediatric patients treated by physiotherapists at the Chris Hani Baragwanath

hospital in 2010 highlights the need to include paediatrics as an independent module within the physiotherapy curriculum.

University A was the only university that had an independent block and lecturer dedicated to paediatrics. Due to limited time available in undergraduate physiotherapy programmes, a minimum of the fifteen most common diagnoses seen at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital could be included in the curricula of universities in South Africa namely; burns, developmental delay, cerebral palsy, ICU, lower limb fracture, acute lung disease, early intervention, neurosurgery, pneumonia, congenital, routine pre/post operation, haemophilia, TB, head injury and meningitis. Not one of the 15 most frequently seen diagnoses, seen by physiotherapists in 2010, were simultaneously covered by all three universities as recorded by the explicit documented curriculum.

Areas that were well covered by all three universities included certain standardised assessments, such as the Gross Motor Function Measure (GMFM) and the Gross Motor Function Classification Scale (GMFCS) and certain diagnoses, such as cerebral palsy (CP). All three universities incorporated a research based approach in their respective curricula.

This study has highlighted the need for an independent paediatric module within physiotherapy curricula and has provided a preliminary framework for paediatric diagnoses within physiotherapy undergraduate degrees.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work, except to the extent indicated in the reference citation and acknowledgements. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Science (Physiotherapy) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Aamena Vachiat

.....day of.....2012

To my family

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