

Is the use of physiotherapy assistants/technicians in the delivery of treatment for patients with musculoskeletal conditions as effective as treatment delivered by qualified physiotherapists only?

Clinical Bottom Line

Criteria for Critically Appraised Topic

Population:

Physiotherapy assistants and/or technicians

Intervention:

Delivery of physiotherapy interventions for musculoskeletal conditions by physiotherapy assistants and/or technicians.

Comparison:

Delivery of a similar physiotherapy intervention for musculoskeletal conditions by a qualified physiotherapist alone.

Outcomes:

Pain, disability, recurrence rate, function, return to normal activities, discharge, bed days, satisfaction, cost effectiveness.

Inclusions:

Physiotherapists, Physiotherapy assistants, helpers, technicians. Physiotherapy interventions for adult patients with musculoskeletal conditions. In-patient and out-patient interventions. Adults with musculoskeletal problems.

Exclusions:

Assistants, helpers, technicians not affiliated to physiotherapy. Physiotherapy interventions for patients with non-musculoskeletal conditions. Patients aged <18 years.

Data bases to search:

Cochrane, Pedro, AMED, NHS library for Health, Medline, Cinahl, Embase, PsycInfo, Clinical evidence, Bandolier, NELH, Professional websites, Guidelines, NICE

Time Frame:

Search for past 17 years:- 1990 - 2007

Search Terms used

Databases Searched:

Cochrane	Pedro	PsychINFO	Medline
Clinical Evidence	Bandolier	NELH	Professional Websites
Clinical Guidelines	NICE	HTA	AMED
Rehab Data	CINAHL	Embase	

Types of study included:

Systematic reviews, RCTs, Qualitative studies, single case studies, expert opinion, clinical audit.

Key words searched:

Profession	Population	Conditions	Interventions	Outcomes
Physical Therapy	Assistant	RA	Exercise	Total time on treatment to discharge
Physiotherapy	Technician	OA	Gait training	Bed days
	Band 3, 4	Musculoskeletal	Mobility	Pain
	Technical assistant	In-patient	Walking aids	Function
	Physiotherapy helper	Out-patient	Treatment	Patient satisfaction
	Technical instructor	orthopaedics	Classes	Disability
		TKR	Education	
		THR	Rehabilitation	
		Trauma	Assessment	
		Knee	Electrotherapy	
		Shoulder	Manual therapy	
		Back		
		Neck		
		Fractures		
		Foot/ankle		
		pain		

Available Evidence

Combined Database Searched (Specific to CAT)	Number of abstracts	Number of Relevant Abstracts
Medline, CINAHL, Embase PyschINFO AMED	48	5

Results:

No evidence was found for using Physiotherapy assistants or technicians in the delivery of physiotherapy interventions to patients with musculoskeletal conditions.

Out of the 48 abstracts identified only 5 were clinical trials or audits looking at the use of Physiotherapy assistants or technicians in the delivery of physiotherapy interventions. Four studies looked at physiotherapy interventions for patients with neurological conditions and one was an audit of a new weekend service using physiotherapy assistants to deliver in-patient rehabilitation for amputees.

Articles assessed:

Nil

Implications for practice

There is increasing use of physiotherapy assistants and technicians in the delivery of physiotherapy interventions to patients with musculoskeletal conditions within the NHS. Our search shows that there is no evidence for the effectiveness or otherwise for using physiotherapy assistants/ technicians to treat patients with musculoskeletal conditions. This is an question that needs to be addressed and warrants further research. Future research should consider the question:

Is the use of physiotherapy assistants/technicians in the delivery of treatment for patients with musculoskeletal conditions as effective as the same treatment delivered by qualified physiotherapists only?

Future research question

Is the management of musculoskeletal patients as effective if delivered by a technical assistant compared to qualified therapist?