

Novel Aspects of International Physical Therapy Practice

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Editorial

As physical therapists, following extensive preparatory training programs, we have access to post professional learning opportunities and professional literature that helps us to practice evidence-based and patient centered physical therapy. In each of our work settings and communities of practice we bring high levels of skilled care to help patients meet their goals and achieve the optimal level of participation and health related quality of life. From this perspective, what makes physical therapy novel?

A definition of novel indicates that something is novel if it is new and not resembling something formerly known or used; something new, but strange or unprecedented (a novel approach to a problem) [1]. Within our everyday practice, we may not identify many novel physical therapy experiences based on this definition. But what happens when we look outside of our practice setting to look at physical therapy practice across the globe.

Physical therapists are movement specialists and part of a large world-wide workforce, providing non-invasive (non-pharmaceutical and non-surgical) interventions [2]. Physical therapy is practiced across the globe to best meet the specific needs of people living in each country. Physical therapy professional education varies in format and content in each country, with a variety of types of diplomas or degrees awarded at the end of the curriculum. When physical therapists have an opportunity to view physical therapy education and practice in other countries, they may be surprised to see how common physical therapy practice in other parts of the world is novel to them.

As a physical therapist trained and practicing in the United States, I have had the fortunate experience to share in physical therapy practice and professional activities in Europe, South America, Asia and Central America. As a guest at an Asian physical therapy meeting, I was amazed to see research presentations related to use of acupuncture in improving functional mobility after stroke, the use of acupuncture to assist in pain relief for individuals with osteoporotic spinal fracture, etc. Post-baccalaureate physical therapy programs in Hong Kong, include coursework on use of acupuncture within physical therapy

practice. Use of acupuncture within physical therapy treatment certainly does not resemble what I have known as physical therapy practice. With my limited exposure to physical therapy practice in the United States, what is well accepted as part of practice in China was certainly novel to me.

As I have collaborated with physical therapy professionals in Central and South America, it has become evident that unique life situations of the patients served dictates the types of physical therapy services that are typical and expected in those countries. In some South American countries, components of respiratory therapy practice are included within physical therapy practice and significant coursework related to respiratory therapy is included in physical therapy education programs. It has also been interesting to see how physical therapy practice needs to be adapted to meet needs of patient in rural, mountainous, jungle or coastal regions. The patients served may have unique occupation related injury or illness unique to their setting. As I have learned more about physical therapy practice in South America, acupuncture is also incorporated within physical therapy practice and is in fact a recognized specialty area of physical therapy practice in some countries.

I challenge physical therapists across the globe to look outside of your home country or specialty area of practice. If you do, you will see that what we do as physical therapists across the globe is certainly novel, unique, sometimes unexpected and certainly interesting. As a global community we have much to learn from one another and to share. As physical therapists we have opportunities to experience and grow from many novel experiences.

References

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