

How physiotherapists from across the globe access current research: a preliminary analysis

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Introduction

An evidence-based approach is recognised as a valued component of physiotherapy practice.¹ However, it is less clear if this positive attitude translates to the implementation of research into clinical decision making, and if physiotherapists globally have the knowledge, skills and resources to do so. To our knowledge, no literature exists investigating how physiotherapists from across the world access new research evidence and how they incorporate this research into clinical practice.

Purpose

To describe practices, knowledge and access physiotherapists have to research globally.

Participants

817 physiotherapists from 101 countries working in a broad variety of locations and specialities.

TABLE 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N=817)

	n	%
Gender		
Female	540	66
Male	277	34
Clinical experience (years)		
Student	211	26
1–5	276	34
6–10	122	15
11–15	54	6
>15	154	19
Region*		
Africa	110	13
The Americas	170	21
South-East Asia	146	18
Europe	185	23
Eastern Mediterranean	82	10
Western Pacific	124	15
Academic qualification		
Student	165	20
Degree level, e.g., BSc	342	42
Masters level, e.g., MSc	187	23
Clinical Doctorate, e.g., DPT	90	11
Research/Academic Doctorate, e.g., PhD	25	3
Professor	8	1

Data are numbers and percentages (%)
 *Based on World Health Organization regional groupings

Methods

Physiotherapists were recruited through a global online platform, a related email list and through social media to participate in a web-based survey. The survey contained 48 items in four domains: demographics and education, current access to research, practices in finding research, and how physiotherapists use and implement research in their clinical practice. A descriptive analysis was completed for all response variables.

Data represent physiotherapists from every region* of the world

Results

Finding research

The majority of respondents (96%) believe that keeping current with the latest research is important, yet only 42% report accessing this information easily. 57% of respondents rely on online sources alerting them to new evidence. When seeking new research the preferred source is online journal publications (38%); whereas, conferences (5%) and printed publications (3%) were much less preferred.

Online resources are valued for disseminating new research evidence



FIGURE 1. Sources physiotherapists use when seeking out new research to help inform their clinical practice (N=817)

Using research

Only 28% have time to look through all the research they think is relevant to them, and 86% wish for better access to full-text research articles.

The majority of participants report being confident performing database searches to seek specific information (67%) and in their ability to critically appraise the quality of a scientific paper (61%). However, 58% report merely scanning abstracts for critical points, and just 30% express a good understanding of statistical analysis.

80% of respondents agree that incorporating research findings into clinical decision making is an important part of their role and 71% indicate that they are doing so. However, 52% do not spend time critiquing the quality and 26% have not applied the findings from research evidence into clinical practice in the past month.

Physiotherapists would welcome support in implementing research into clinical practice

Physiotherapists surveyed were keen for training on finding (80%) and critical appraisal of (78%) research evidence. In addition, they were interested in a variety of knowledge translation activities to help improve their usage of research.



FIGURE 2. Interest in specific resources to help improve the use of research evidence in clinical decision making (N=817) Percentage (%) is based on number of participants who responded that they were "interested" or "very interested"

Discussion & Conclusions

Physiotherapists from across the globe believe that research evidence is important, but there is a desire for improved access to resources and the skills needed to interpret it. Online resources appear important to physiotherapists, but their use can be limited by full-text availability and ability to critique and analyse the research.

As the volume and online availability of resources continues to increase, understanding how physiotherapists access and use research, and preferences for knowledge translation activities, may inform future efforts to support evidence-based practice in physiotherapists globally.

Recommendations

Future work should investigate how researchers are currently disseminating their work to physiotherapists.

Reference

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy—European Region. Evidence based physiotherapy [Internet]. Brussels: The Confederation; 2015. Available from: http://www.erwcpt.eu/education/evidence_based_physiotherapy_evidence_and_research

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mariam Hashem for presenting this poster in the absence of the authors, and to James Aird for assistance with data analysis.

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