

Physiotherapy's place in the world

The right to health as a fundamental human right was agreed to over 50 years ago in the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO (1948)). Subsequently in its resolution 2002/31, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights took a step used only for the most important matters affecting global society, and created a mandate of Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The resolution was endorsed and extended by the Human Rights Council, resolution 6/29 (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007). At this point in time the world is nowhere near its target of everyone enjoying the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, though there have been some major advances. For example, global life expectancy in 1955 was 48 years and by 2025 it is estimated to be 73 years, and cross country differences in life expectancy have fallen (Laxminarayan et al 2006).

What voice does physiotherapy have in progress towards the right for all to health? The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) is the international voice for physiotherapists around the world. Through its official relation with the WHO, WCPT is consulted on many issues addressed by the WHO; is actively involved with many of the WHO's reference groups, including the group that has just released the World Report on Ageing and Health (WHO, 2015); and advises on matters such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

WCPT is committed to furthering the physiotherapy profession and improving global health and wellbeing through promotion of high standards of practice, education and research. (WCPT, 2013). To achieve its vision the global profession must keep focused on the key factors that describe physiotherapy, and the influence that physical inactivity has on the primary factors impacting on global health, namely non communicable diseases (NCDs) and an ageing society. WCPT believes that physiotherapists are equipped, through their education, to meet the needs of people with or at risk of NCDs; and to provide evidence based interventions that can reduce the incidence of NCDs and associated disability and mortality; as well as playing a vital role in the prevention and management of NCDs (WCPT 2015a).

In order to continue to make a positive contribution to improving global health the profession must ensure that the world has a practice ready physiotherapy workforce and that each country has a physiotherapy workforce that is sufficient to meet the demands of the population. A practice ready workforce means we must link entry level education to practice models that meet health needs of the future and that there is a match between curriculum content and global health priorities. For physiotherapy the variation across schools and the mismatch between curriculum and global health priorities have been highlighted over recent years (Dean et al 2011) and the argument for evidence-based core competencies in health assessment and lifestyle behaviour change being included as

a core part of student learning has been promoted (Dean et al 2014). As well, there has been a call to realign physiotherapy education to place an emphasis on interprofessional education, including interprofessional competencies such as health promotion, which fit with future societal health needs and more collaborative, sustainable health (Dean et al 2014).

Schools of physiotherapy around the world need to ensure that they are making such changes in the context of the cultural and societal needs of their populations and working with other colleagues to embrace interprofessional education as a practice model for all intending health professionals.

Physiotherapy is not the only health profession falling short of its requirement to ensure a practice-ready workforce. Several recently published reports have described major mismatches between current health professional education and current health practice needs, including the report by the WHO (2010). The WHO supports the model of collaborative practice as the way forward for health (WHO 2010). Evidence confirms collaborative practice provides for improved access to health interventions and improved coordination between different sectors; a more patient/family centred role in decision making; a system that is more responsive to health needs; more efficient use of resources; reduction in the incidence and prevalence of disability when the collaborative practice model is used across the spectrum of ICD management; and for health professionals collaborative practice is associated with increased job satisfaction, reduced stress and less burnout (WHO 2010).

In 2012 Health Workforce New Zealand provided funding to both the University of Auckland and the University of Otago and their partner institutes to each establish a three year trial using a model of interprofessional education as a way of engaging with rural communities with high health needs, and with the potential outcome that some students who have had clinical experience in an interprofessional education setting using the model would return to these communities to practise. One such programme run by the University of Otago in the Tairāwhiti region has already demonstrated that not only are there benefits to students and staff engaged in interprofessional education but also benefits to the community through social accountability (Gallagher et al 2015).

More opportunities for students to engage in interprofessional education will be important to ensure the global physiotherapy profession is prepared to take our place as practice ready health professionals for a future where NCDs will continue to predominate. Other priorities that must also be addressed globally at the foundation level include a realignment of curriculum content with the current evidence for healthy ageing (WHO 2015) and increasing opportunities in many countries for more students to access physiotherapy entry level education to correct the imbalance in supply and demand (WCPT 2015b). If we achieve these priorities we shall be well along the path of ensuring not only that access to physiotherapy services is a right, but that the global population can enjoy the highest attainable standard of physiotherapy.

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