



Letter to Editor

The underestimated and under rated role of Physiotherapists during COVID-19 in Pakistan

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To the Editor

Physiotherapists are healthcare professionals having direct contact with patients suffering from chronic disorders including COVID-19 [1]. Physiotherapists are also among the practitioners taking responsibility for the wellbeing of the COVID-19 and other infectious diseases management and outcomes thus sharing handsome amount of workload with healthcare systems [2]. Physiotherapists possess a keen knowledge of COVID-19 and have hands on workforce planning during this pandemic. They know better when, where, and how to present their services for the betterment of patients suffering from corona viral infections. The important roles and responsibilities include Reducing Risk for Avoidable Hospitalization, Helping Offload Emergency Department Volume as Part of an Interdisciplinary Team and Meeting Post discharge Rehabilitation Demand for Survivors of COVID-19 [3]. During the recovery phase of most disorders physiotherapists along with other members of healthcare multidisciplinary team such as dieticians and psychologists play their part to improve health. COVID-19 in this respect is not an exception, where physiotherapists can play a vital role in rehabilitation process [4]. The challenges faced as acute care physical therapists during this pandemic are not new—historically, as a profession we have struggled to establish our role and value within our health systems. The positive changes seen within those systems that are actively engaging their rehabilitation departments to meet the needs of patients with COVID-19 can set the stage for a sustained paradigm shift in the roles and value of acute care physical therapy [5]. This evolution is two-fold and includes: (1) maintenance of staffing levels needed to increase frequency and intensity of rehabilitation treatments in the acute care setting, and (2) investment in research to maximize the value of acute care physical therapy [5].

Before corona virus pandemic Pakistan was among the countries with scores of disabled population which proved to be a huge burden on poor healthcare system of the country [6]. As 70% of the population of this country live in remote villages away from basic rights of health. These individual are unable to access healthcare professionals including physiotherapists [7]. This can be a reason for deprived role and awareness of public regarding the role of physiotherapists in containment of COVID-19 infections and improving post COVID life of those infected.

A study during 2020 conducted in Pakistan among patients expressed positive attitude regarding the role of Physiotherapists in Pakistan including COVID-19. Patients were found to be more satisfied after experiencing physiotherapy services rather than before, without the professionals services of Physiotherapists [8]. The key professional roles of physiotherapists including acute hospital care such as respiratory intervention and rehabilitation is ignored in Pakistan due to poor healthcare structure and compromised literacy rate of individuals. As in the developed countries special assistance and attention must be paid to enhance the role of Physiotherapists in uplifting the quality of life of patients infected with novel corona virus in Pakistan [9].

Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shall play their part in awareness and knowledge of general public about the roles of physiotherapists in post COVID rehabilitations processes. Such steps will help the country fight this pandemic more professionally than ever thus enhancing the quality of life of Pakistani nationals with decreasing burden on healthcare systems of the country.

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