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Subject comments/ suggestions on Health Reform

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Physiotherapy has an important role in the Primary Health Care System

Physiotherapy “provides services to people and populations to develop, maintain and restore maximum movement and functional ability throughout the lifespan” (WCPT 2007). A major educational training component for a physiotherapist involves **assessment** of individuals with actual or potential impairment of functional disability, **diagnosis** of movement dysfunction and limitations, planning of intervention with measurable outcome goals, **implementation** of appropriate interventions for promotion and maintenance of health, fitness, and quality of life at **all ages** in the population, and **evaluation** of the outcome of interventions. In health promotion, appropriate engagement in activities and exercise which maximizes body function is essential. The physiotherapy undergraduate curriculum prepares its graduates for exercise prescription by way of a comprehensive educational programme in movement science, exercise physiology, prevention and management of sports injuries, as well as exercise prescriptions for maintenance of health and for people with special needs (such as diabetes, renal dysfunction, pregnancy etc).

Although able to appropriately “screen” body system function, the physiotherapist is fully aware of their clinical limitations and will appropriately refer patients/clients to medical practitioners or their peers in a different specialty area, when necessary. A physiotherapist is therefore well equipped to function seamlessly in the primary health care system.

In overseas countries, physiotherapists have long been engaged in primary health care and have expanded their role into patient triage in the accident and emergency department. In Hong Kong, physiotherapists are certainly able to participate as a first contact practitioner and liaise with medical practitioners in the management of musculoskeletal injuries, neuro-rehabilitation and exercise prescription for maintenance and promotion of cardiorespiratory fitness.

An interdisciplinary collaboration applied broadly in the community could facilitate promotion of primary health care. This can be implemented by encouraging schools to establish physiotherapy positions which work closely with physical education teachers for exercise training and injury prevention and management; establishment of community health centres which involve a multidisciplinary team which includes general practitioners, nurses and physiotherapists for health education, health promotion activities and for physiotherapists to coordinate exercise prescription and management of physical dysfunction for the population in each district.

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