



## Original Article

## Perception of Medical Practitioners Regarding Patient Referral to Physiotherapy

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Key Words:

Perception, Medical Practitioner, Patient Referral, Physiotherapy

## How to Cite:

Irfan, K. ., Amjad, F. ., Arslan, S. A. U. ., Ahmad, A. ., Javaid, F., Muhammad, A. S. ., & Hashim, A. . (2022). Perception Of Medical Practitioners Regarding Patient Referral to Physiotherapy: Perception Regarding Patient Referral to Physiotherapy. Pakistan BioMedical Journal, 5(4), 72-76. <https://doi.org/10.54393/pbmj.v5i4.348>

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Received Date: 3rd April, 2022

Acceptance Date: 22nd April, 2022

Published Date: 30th April, 2022

## ABSTRACT

Physiotherapy obliges in a widespread of health settings including intensive care, mental illness, stroke recovery, occupational health, and care of the elderly. Physiotherapy is undoubtedly far more than treating muscle and skeletal associated sports injuries though that is perhaps the most usual perception of the profession. **Objective:** To give us an insight into the current perceptions held by other professionals who are currently practicing medicine regarding patient referral to physiotherapy. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted. Sample size was 225. Sampling method was convenient sampling. A self-designed Questionnaire was distributed among the medical practitioners that were currently working at various hospitals and clinics which were currently operational and were located in various regions of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The required questionnaires were filled out within a period of 3 months. **Results:** Out of total 225, 57% were males and 43% were females. Participants on the basis of their specialties were 55% from general practice, and 45% from medical specialties. The referral rate among the participants showed that 14% of participants did not refer any patients at all, 22% rarely referred patients, 49% referred patients sometimes and 15% of participants referred on a regular basis. 30% of respondents referred patients with a prescription and 70% referred patients with a prescription did not believe that a physiotherapist cannot devise an action plan without proper instruction. While 53% of medical doctors included a specified medical diagnosis in there and 47% that include a medical diagnosis said that this was not the cause of including it in referrals. **Conclusions:** It was concluded that participants were found to have a well response about the patient referral to physiotherapy, the likelihood of referral is good and the majority of participants admit physiotherapy as an autonomous profession and have the opinion that physiotherapists are trained enough to determine the right treatment for their patients.

## INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapy is an across the world identified health and fitness career which can be practiced through certified and, in which required through country or countrywide legislation, duly registered or certified physiotherapists only [1]. Physiotherapists spend numerous years instructing themselves in a perspective on the body that recognizes them from different specialists, and they secure their expert status, monetary help, and administrative assurance, to some degree, as a result of their skill in overseeing medical issues that have as their center the function and dysfunction of the body [2]. Physiotherapy obliges in a widespread of health settings

including intensive care, mental illness, stroke recovery, occupational health, and care of the elderly. Physiotherapy is undoubtedly far more than treating muscle and skeletal associated sports injuries though that is perhaps the most usual perception of the profession [3]. Physiotherapy is shared with medical practitioner and is based on scientific philosophy. Physiotherapy requires specializations in various fields for the benefit of the society and physiotherapy as a profession is an occupation [4]. As physical therapy with time evolves into a more autonomous profession, doctors continue to play a key role in the clinical practice of physiotherapists, mainly as a source of patient

referral [5]. There are many varieties of medical practitioners that are usually called as doctors; however, there are 2 main categories: primary care or specialty care. Among these 2 categories, doctors vary wide in their specialty space and level to which they are trained. The first category of doctors' primary care ones includes General Practitioners which are also called as GP's and medicine doctors or more specifically Internal Medicine doctors. The general practitioner gets involves with independent persons across the fields of prevention, diagnosis, cure, care, and palliation, using and integrating the sciences of biomedicine, medical psychology, and medical sociology –[6]. Special care doctors more specifically medical specialists include various types differentiated by the education and training received in a specific specialty of their choosing Some of the specialties are: orthopedics they focus on the ailments and disorders of the musculoskeletal system. These specialists possibly will provide treatment diseases like osteoarthritis, fracture of bones, muscle injuries etc. Gynecology, this specialty focuses on the care and management of the disorders of the female population. Cardiology, this specialty concentrates on the cardio-vascular system, which take account the heart and blood vessels. They treat several cardio-vascular illnesses like myocardial infarction, hypertension, heart failure etc. Neurology, this specialty concentrates on disorders related to the central and peripheral nervous system such as Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, stroke, neuropathy etc. Pediatrics, this specialty emphasis on treating children from the day they are born until they have become a young adult[7-9]. Doctors decide to refer patients to other doctors in other hospitals for a multitude of reasons ranging from the need for specialization to addressing problems of overcrowding [9-11]. People are typically referred for physical therapy by doctors or alternative health and social care experts. Medical doctors have deep impact on other healthcare occupations as well as physical therapy because they occupy an upper position in the hierarchy of healthcare experts. The practice of physiotherapy as a prescription rather than as a referral, on a consultation basis is now discouraged in some advanced countries[12]. Perception is man's primary form of cognitive contact with the world around him. As all conceptual knowledge is based upon or derived from this primary form of awareness, the study of perception has always had a unique significance for philosophy and science [13]. Perception is an individual's view making it a great driving force for action. Processing sensory information and relating to past experiences enables one to create a lens in which to view the world[14]. Chris J. Duisk et al., conducted a cross-sectional survey which aimed to evaluate referral of trauma patients by

orthopedic surgeons to physiotherapy [15]. Majority of the referrals from physician did not contain sufficient or complete information based on a standard referral format, and most physicians use physiotherapy on "prescription basis" rather than on "consultation basis"[16]. Physical therapy considering their perceptions and beliefs and their level of referral with regard to their experience and specialty, education, and work hospital the authors concluded that that although there was moderate awareness about physiotherapists among the responding participants, there was variation in the referral of patients to PT departments, which was dependent on doctor's specialty and work experience[17]. Mariam et al conducted a cross-sectional observational study aimed to assess the referral of patients to physical therapy by the by the medical professionals of the ISRA University Hospital located in Hyderabad Sindh Pakistan[18]. There is a chance to raise referrals from GP's for several common conditions that are responsive to physiotherapy[19]. Omar O. Alnajjar et al., the results of this study was 96.9% of physicians believe that physiotherapy plays an important role in the treatment plan for the patient 95.3% of physicians say that they write on the referral what should a physiotherapist do to a patient, and that is a huge violation of the physiotherapists' right of making their own decision [20]. The Rationale of the study is to assess perceptions held by medical professionals who are practicing medicine regarding patient referral to physiotherapy.

## METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted. Sample size was 225. Sampling method was convenient sampling. A self-designed Questionnaire was distributed among the medical practitioners that were currently working various hospitals and clinics which were currently operational and were located in various regions of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The required questionnaires were filled within a period of 3 months. The ethical committee from The University of Lahore approved the synopsis before this research's ritualistic starting point. Data was collected from medical practitioners that were currently working various hospitals including Ghurki Trust and Teaching hospital, Punjab Institute of Cardiology, Punjab Rangers Teaching hospital, Jinnah hospital, General hospital, Bahria Hospital and clinics which were currently in working and were located in various regions of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Practitioners up to 65 years of age, House officer and internees, medical specialists (Consultants) and General Practitioners was included in this study. Paramedics, Dentists, Pharmacists, Veterinarian, Chiropractors and Practitioners above the age of 65 years were excluded. After taking informed written consent,

necessary demographic data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and numbers) were used for the demographic data and assessing the perceptions of medical practitioners regarding patient referral to physiotherapy.

## RESULTS

The results showed that out of 225 participants of the study the participants that were in the age bracket of less than 30 showed the highest percentage which was 69.8% participants, following that, the participants that were in the age bracket of 31-40 years had a percentage of 21.8% respondents. Moreover, the participants that were in the age bracket of above 50 years had a percentage of 8% and lastly with the smallest percentage of only 0.4% were the participants that were in the age bracket of 41 -50 years (Table 1). The gender distribution of participants was as follows; Males 56.9% and females 43.1%. 46.7% were from education/teaching hospital, 20.4% were from government hospitals. Similarly, participants of military hospitals had a percentage of 8.0%, Private clinic represents 18.2% participants and lastly, we had private hospitals which represent 6.7% of our sample size. 72.9% had less than 5 years of work experience, participants with more than 20 years of work experience were 8.0% and participants within the work experience bracket of 5 to 20 years were 19.1%. Participants on the basis of their specialties were 54.7% from general practice, 45.3% from medical specialty (Table 1).

Socio demographic detail	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
31 to 40 years	49	21.8%
41 to 50 years	1	.4%
Above 50 years	18	8.0%
Less than 30 years	157	69.8%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	128	56.9%
Female	97	43.1%
<b>Working location</b>		
Educational/Teaching hospital	105	46.7%
Government hospital	48	20.4%
Military hospital	18	8.0%
Private clinic	41	18.2%
Private hospital	15	6.7%
<b>Working experience</b>		
<5	164	72.9%
>20 years	18	8.0%
5-20 years	43	19.1%
<b>Specialty</b>		
General practitioners	123	54.7%
Medical Specialists	102	45.3%

**Table 1:** Socio Demographic Details

The distribution of referral rate among the participants showed that 13.8% participants did not refer any patients at all, 22.2% rarely referred patients, 49.3% referred patients sometimes and 14.7% participants referred on a regular basis, 13.8% participants did not recommend any actions because they did not refer any patients, 28.4% suggested assessing & giving treatment, and 35.6% suggested rehab procedure and 22.2% suggested strengthening and ROM. The study showed that 64.4% participants said their referrals were not associated to surgery, 21.8% said theirs were associated to surgery and 13.8% refrained from sending any referrals at all (Table 2).

Section:1 Referral Rate		
Questions	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Have you referred any patients for physiotherapy</b>		
Do not refer at all	31	13.8%
Rarely refer	50	22.2%
Refer occasionally	111	49.3%
Refer regularly	33	14.7%
<b>What actions do you recommend in your referrals</b>		
you do not refer at all	31	13.8%
Evaluate & Treat	64	28.4%
Routine Rehab Protocol	80	35.6%
Strengthening & Range of Motion	50	22.2%
<b>Were your referrals surgery related or not?</b>		
you do not refer at all	31	13.8%
Non-surgery related	145	64.4%
Surgery related	49	21.8%

**Table 2:** Referral Rate

Table 3 showed that 84% participants referred patients to physiotherapy because they were educated about during their training period; on the other hand, 16% responded otherwise. 30.2% respondents referred patients with a prescription because they believe physiotherapist cannot devise an action plan without proper instruction and 69.8% referred patients with a prescription did not believe that a physiotherapist cannot devise an action plan without proper instruction. The study showed that 53.4% medical doctors included a specified medical diagnosis in their referrals because they lacked confidence in physiotherapist diagnostic abilities and 46.6% that include a medical diagnosis said that this was not the cause of including it in referrals. Out of the participants 36.4% referred on a colleague/superior's recommendation and 27.1% not referred on the recommendation of colleague/superiors., lastly 36.4% sometimes referred on the recommendation of their superiors/colleagues. 29.8% of the sample did not send in patient referrals due to their lack of knowledge regarding the physiotherapy training and 70.2% responded otherwise. The study revealed that 21.8%

respondents believe that they did not refer patients to physiotherapy because they perceived it as just a compliment to medicine; however, 78.2% responded otherwise. The study revealed that 9.3% practitioners believe that there are not enough scientific bases regarding physiotherapy hence they did not refer, on the other end 90.7% responded otherwise. Among the responding participants 32% responded they did not send in patient referrals, due to the expensive nature of physiotherapy treatment, 68% responded otherwise. 14.2% practitioners avoided sending in referrals because they believe physiotherapy is ineffective however 85.8% of practitioners responded otherwise (Table 3).

Section: 2 Refer Patient to Physiotherapy		
Questions	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Do you refer patients to physiotherapy because you were informed about physiotherapy referral during your training period?</b>		
No	36	16.0%
Yes	189	84.0%
<b>Do you refer patients with prescriptions because you think a physiotherapist cannot form a plan of care without instructions?</b>		
No	157	69.8%
Yes	68	30.2%
<b>Do you include specific medical diagnoses in your referral because you are not confident in the physiotherapist's ability to make a diagnosis?</b>		
No	105	46.6%
Yes	120	53.4%
<b>Do you refer patients to physiotherapy on other doctor's (colleague/superior) recommendation?</b>		
No	61	27.1%
Sometimes	82	36.4%
Yes	82	36.4%
<b>Do you not refer patients because you do not know much about physiotherapy training?</b>		
No	158	70.2%
Yes	67	29.8%
<b>Do you not refer patients because you believe physiotherapy is just complimentary to medicine?</b>		
No	176	78.2%
Yes	49	21.8%
<b>Do you not refer patients because you believe physiotherapy does not have enough scientific bases?</b>		
No	204	90.7%
Yes	21	9.3%
<b>Do you not refer patients because you view physiotherapy as an expensive treatment?</b>		
No	153	68.0%
Yes	72	32.0%

**Table 3:** Refer Patient to Physiotherapy

## DISCUSSION

Previous studies have showed that physicians stated having negative perceptions about physiotherapy like not knowing much about physiotherapy training, thinking

physiotherapy is complimentary to medicine and physiotherapy doesn't have enough scientific bases [17]. Present Study displays that, 84% participants referred patients to physiotherapy because they were educated about during their training period; 29.8% of the sample did not send in patient referrals due to their lack of knowledge regarding the physiotherapy training, the study revealed that 21.8% respondents believe that they did not refer patients to physiotherapy because they perceived it as just a compliment to medicine. Previous study, said that there was a significant awareness of Physiotherapy and its various functions with a high number of written informed references. Most of the doctors did include a medical diagnosis in the reference. Significant number of doctors not only allowed physiotherapists to decide choice of treatment but also interacted with the physiotherapists [10]. Present study showed that 46.7% medical doctors included a specified medical diagnosis in their referrals because they lacked confidence in physiotherapist diagnostic abilities and 42.2% that include a medical diagnosis said that this was not the cause of including it in referrals. 1.1% did fall in any of the both categories because do not refer at all. 30.2% respondents referred patients with a prescription because they believe physiotherapist cannot devise an action plan without proper instruction and 69.8% referred patients with a prescription did not believe that a physiotherapist cannot devise an action plan without proper instruction. In a previous study it was found majority of medical professionals refer their patients for physiotherapy treatment and minority participants do not refer patients for physiotherapy treatment. 58.3% respondents viewed physiotherapy is expensive treatment, 37.50% said it's not expensive treatment [18]. Present study showed that among the responding participants majority of medical professionals refer patients for physiotherapy and minority participants do not refer at all. 32% responded they did not send in patient referrals, due to the expensive nature of physiotherapy treatment, 68% responded otherwise and also majority of the participants refer patients.

## CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that, participants were found to have well response about the patient referral to physiotherapy, the likelihood of referral is good and majority of participants admit physiotherapy as autonomous profession and have opinion that physiotherapist are trained enough to determine the right treatment for their patients for physiotherapy. There is a slim lack of confidence in the diagnostic abilities of a physiotherapist among referring medical practitioners. The likelihood of referral can be further increased by decreasing cost of physiotherapy

treatment, promoting professional image about physiotherapy and discouraging bad perspectives about physiotherapy among medical practitioners.

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