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Title: Motivational strategies in physiotherapy: A discussion of applied suggestions and future development needs of the practicing physiotherapist.

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Invited commentary on: Motivational Strategies for physiotherapists

The work titled “Motivational Strategies for physiotherapists” provides a discussion as to the major motivational strategies which can be adopted by physiotherapists. This acknowledges the increasing worldwide concern regarding the impact that sedentary behaviour and inactivity can play in the rise of ‘chronic lifestyle conditions’. The paper highlights the lacking compliance with physical activity and specifically identifies the problematic behaviour of non-attendance of physiotherapy sessions and adherence to exercise prescriptions.

It is argued that the physiotherapist is often considered the best positioned professional to offer expert guidance and to address the psychological aspect of an individual’s rehabilitation [1-4]. Furthermore, the ability to increase exercise activity and maintain client engagement with the rehabilitation process are critical skills for the physiotherapist to possess. However, despite the notion that contemporary clinically competent physiotherapist must be aware of behaviour change strategies there is still a lacking psychological knowledge base within the discipline on which to support motivational interventions.

It should be noted that that whilst not being systematic or experimental in style, the nature of the opinion paper provides an overview of important motivation strategies which can be adopted. Nevertheless the discussion centres on the suggestion that the physiotherapist’s position as a health promoter with frequent client contact position them ideally to positively influence levels of physical activity. Subsequently the authors usefully identify a select range of strategies which can be adopted by the practicing physiotherapist.

The discussion revolves around a range of psychological concepts and interventions strategies and the influence of behaviour change specifically increasing physical activity. Specifically the underpinning theories of Self-determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, and intervention strategies grounded in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Motivational Interviewing are discussed with regard to applications within physiotherapy. The discussion is useful distinguishing between the theoretical underpinning and the practical examples on which professional practice can be based in addition the authors also successfully provide a sound rationale for the inclusion of such strategies grounded on established scientific literature.

It is interesting to note the author's choice to distinguish between the four proposed theories. It could be argued that cognitive behavioural interventions and the motivational interviewing style are hinged on the underpinning self-determination and social cognitive theories with regard to both the need for relatedness and autonomy while acknowledging the social influence on behaviour. Nevertheless the approach adopted by the authors adds to the clarity of the paper and the ability to derive practical applications.

It would appear that there is lacking support presented for the selection of one approach over another presented within the article however in summarising the theoretical underpinning it is evident that commonalities exist within all approaches. It would therefore be apparent that regarding applied practical recommendations for the physiotherapist there is not a preferred method identified which does suggest the role individual differences can play regarding acceptance of psychological interventions. Thus, care must be used when not proposing a one size fits all approach universal across ranging scenarios. Universal characteristics do exist across the recommended strategies, for instance the need for self-efficacy and autonomous behaviour. Thus, clients must have confidence that they can adhere to, or perform, the required behaviours as prescribed, furthermore the individual must possess confidence that the prescribed interventions will result in positive outcomes. Equally it is important that the individual has perceived control of their own actions to promote behaviour change. It would therefore be strongly recommended that physiotherapists are competing in facilitating client efficacy through education and verbal encouragement while also being competent at maintaining a client led decision making process.

The discussion provides an interesting and accessible summary of key concepts concerning behaviour change which are applicable to physiotherapy (and indeed across many domains). Whilst suggestions are provided relating to methods of incorporating such theory within applied practice, the challenge would be to cater for the oft-cited need for practical experience in implementing such strategies. Previously work has explored the perceived knowledge of physiotherapists relating to the application of psychology [1, 2]. This suggests that practitioners are typically capable at identifying the need for psychological interventions yet feel ill-equipped to provide applicable techniques, with decisions made based upon intuition gained through experience rather than formal education. Furthermore, the perceptions towards psychology and the willingness to utilise such strategies have previously been evidenced to be unaffected by attendance of formal psychology training post certification [5]. Thus further evidencing the requirement for a structured psychological educational programme grounded within experiential learning.

The present work provides an encouraging start point for the physiotherapy professional to identify appropriate psychological strategies to promote physical activity. Future work would be advised to focus on the educational strategies to provide practitioners with the knowledge of how to align applied practice with the physical activity and behaviour modification theory.

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