

Implications for Understanding the Practice of Physiotherapy

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Description

Touch, while ubiquitous and ever present in the practice of physiotherapy, is conspicuously absent from physiotherapy-related research. Based on a theoretical perspective inspired by phenomenology, this article explores and elaborates on the meaning and significance of touch in the practice of physiotherapy. The research data were generated through 16 close observations conducted in primary care clinics and through interviews with 9 physiotherapists and with 9 patients suffering from chronic neck problems. The findings revealed how the use of touch in the practice of physiotherapy brings people into proximity in ways more complex than simple skin-to-skin contact. Through no touch, touch, and movements, physiotherapists invite their patients to participate in the process of creating and performing therapy; dialogue through touch and movement is vital. Touch in physiotherapy depends on the physiotherapist's embodied skills; those they cultivate in order to respectfully listen to their patients and guide them to explore their own bodily capacity, limits and possibilities. The findings also suggest that observing therapy from outside and from participating in it offer significant different experiences, information, understanding, and meanings. The differences between physiotherapy as observed expression and as lived experience would seem to have important implications for understanding the practice of physiotherapy.

Static Postures

In physiotherapy, as with many other health-care practices, therapeutic interventions, based on scientific knowledge, may be at odds with patient experiences. Patients may understand what they need to do to improve their health condition, but feel that these requirements may be emotionally, socially, or culturally incompatible with their lifestyles, social behavior, or personal choices. To work in the best interest of their patients, physiotherapists need to engage with the tensions that exist between scientific reason and social reality to offer a meaningful and relevant service for their patients. The challenge for physiotherapists is to arrive at decisions and interventions together with their patients that enhance, for example, mobility, social function, and well-being. To achieve this, physiotherapists need to rethink their professional role and translate their technical knowledge and goals into the patient's 'lifeworld', and patients – for their part – need to engage with physiotherapy

professional knowledge. Often, the most commonly used strategy for facilitating this reciprocal engagement is open dialogue between patients and therapists. Habermas, a prominent contemporary philosopher and critical theorist, has developed a communicative theory that may support physiotherapists in their efforts to arrive at more sustainable and shared decisions with their patients. In this paper, I examine what constitutes physiotherapists' practice knowledge and how Habermas's theory of knowledge, interest, and communication strengthens shared decision-making and can be used as a vehicle toward emancipatory practice. Drawing on data generated in an action research project, I examine how Habermas's ideas can be applied in emancipatory physiotherapy practice. The paper concludes that emancipatory practice is meaningful because it creates opportunities for reflection, evaluation, and choice for future physiotherapy practice.

Electrophysical agents are utilised to bring about physiological effects, and it is these changes which bring about the therapeutic benefit rather than the modality itself. Clinical decision protocols employing the available evidence should enable the most appropriate modality to be employed for a particular patient. Indiscriminate use of electrotherapy is unlikely to yield significant benefit, however used at the right time, it has the potential to achieve beneficial effect. The patient management programme which combines manual therapy, exercise therapy and electrotherapy, based on current evidence, should enable the most efficacious management of a patients' dysfunction. This paper aims to consider some of the current concepts in electrotherapy and to relate this to both general and specific treatments.

Parkinson's Disease

Manual therapy, exercise and education target distinct aspects of chronic low back pain and probably have distinct effects. This study aimed to determine the efficacy of a combined physiotherapy treatment that comprised all of these strategies. By concealed randomisation, 57 chronic low back pain patients were allocated to either the four-week physiotherapy program or management as directed by their general practitioners. The dependent variables of interest were pain and disability. Despite medical therapies and surgical interventions for Parkinson's disease (PD), patients develop progressive disability. Physiotherapy aims to maximise functional ability and minimise secondary complications through

movement rehabilitation within a context of education and support for the whole person. The overall aim is to optimise independence, safety, and well-being, thereby enhancing quality of life.