A SURVEY ON PHYSICAL THERAPISTS AND THEIR ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHILE TREATING PATIENTS IN TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: This study is an attempt to identify which ethical decisions are most frequently encountered and are most difficult to make for practicing physical therapists. Physiotherapy raises serious bioethical questions that are far too little discussed which include the lack of a clearly defined end point, the closeness of interaction between the therapist and patient, the patient’s own share of responsibility, and the common failure to refer patients for rehabilitation. OBJECTIVE: To identify various ethical conflicts and ethical considerations among the physiotherapists which are raised in different scenarios while treating the patients. METHODOLOGY: STUDY DESIGN: Non-experimental STUDY TYPE: Observational type STUDY DURATION: Four weeks STUDY SETTINGS: In and around Hyderabad PROCEDURE: Using questionnaire method, this survey will be collected from different physiotherapists to bring out their ethical considerations and decisions while treating the patients. RESULT AND CONCLUSION: Will be revealed after the completion of the study.

KEY WORDS: Ethics, professional, Physical therapy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a systematic reflection on morality. We say systematic because, this is a discipline which uses different methods and approaches to analyse the situations. It is also a reflection since it questions the existing aspects of morality.

Morality can be basically referred to a group of notions about what is right? And what is wrong? About self and combined decisions with patients. Healthcare professionals can be confronted with a wide range of ethical and regulatory issues even today. In the past few decades, Physical therapy profession has experienced a significant increase in professional autonomy.

The physical therapist today defines the limits of his legal and professional autonomy, which examines the practice of his profession from an ethical point of view.

The need to identify ethical issues is to assume responsibility in direct health care service. While it helps him to carefully protect the rights of patients, confidentiality of profession and to promote the profession.

The APTA Code of Ethics and the guidelines have been made in order to counsel Physical Therapists making ethical judgements by asserting the ideals of the profession and by defining some of the limits of professionally and morally acceptable behaviour.

AIM

The aim of this study was to identify various ethical conflicts and ethical considerations among the Physical Therapists which are raised in different scenarios while treating the patients.
The various ethical conflicts persisting in the Physical Therapy profession makes it inevitable to identify which ethical decisions are most frequently encountered and are most difficult to make for practicing Physical Therapists.

**PROCEDURE**

Five case studies that described 10 scenarios suggestive of ethical problems were presented to the samples in a questionnaire format.

The questionnaire was forwarded to the Physiotherapists in and around Telangana and were asked to answer according to their views and personal experience.

- You are working in a rehabilitation centre where you have been treating a multiple sclerosis patient since a very long time. You know that the patient is terminally ill.
- You are working in a clinic. While treating the patients, they experience some kind of discomfort related to the treating procedure. You are aware of these discomforts occurring during the procedure.
- You are running a clinic since 2 years. You have not been getting patients since 6 months. You know that you have to maintain the clinic and give salaries to your employees.
- You are working as a physiotherapist in a clinic where you see one of your colleagues is using phone while treating the patient. You know it is unethical to do so.
- You are treating a patient when he questions your diagnosis and starts arguing with you. Two of your ethical principles are in conflict.

The study was done over the period of four weeks by forwarding the Google form containing the questionnaire to the Physical Therapists from different hospitals and clinical setups across Telangana state. The data was then analysed after four weeks and interpreted.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

1. Would you still continue treating the patient in spite of his deteriorating health?

43 responses

- Yes, to a great degree: 20.9%
- Yes, to a certain degree: 46.5%
- No, not especially: 11.6%
- No, not at all: 20.9%
2. Do you think there will be any betterment in his condition with physiotherapy treatment?

43 responses

![Pie chart showing responses to the question about betterment in condition.]

- Yes, to a great degree: 62.8%
- Yes, to a certain degree: 10.3%
- No, not especially: 18.6%
- No, not at all: 8.3%

Case study 2: Weighing the effects of treatment against the discomfort by the procedure.

1. Will you stop the treatment immediately instead of explaining the nature of the procedure to the patient?

43 responses

![Pie chart showing responses to the question about stopping treatment.]

- Yes, to a great degree: 39.5%
- Yes, to a certain degree: 23.3%
- No, not especially: 14%
- No, not at all: 23.3%
2. Will you ignore the patients' complain of the discomfort and continue doing your work as you know it is harmless and bound to happen?
43 responses

Case study 3: Withholding or limiting physical therapy services in order to improve work conditions, salaries, etc.

1. Would you extend the treatment period of the patients beyond needed to make money?
43 responses

2. Would you increase the consultant and treatment charges?
48 responses
Case study 4: Reporting questionable practices of another physical therapist to the appropriate person.

1. Would you inform to the appropriate person about your colleague’s unethical practice?
   43 responses

   - Yes, to a great degree: 11.6%
   - Yes, to a certain degree: 14%
   - No, not especially: 37.2%
   - No, not at all: 37.2%

2. Would you take the initiative to remind her/him the ethical guidelines of your profession?
   43 responses

   - Yes, to a great degree: 25.6%
   - Yes, to a certain degree: 11.6%
   - No, not especially: 37.2%
   - No, not at all: 37.4%
III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, we identified few key ethical issues that were seen as presenting in distinctive ways in the context conducted in Telangana.

In scenario 1, we can see that among the 43 members who participated in our study, 20 members consider treating the terminally ill patients, while 5 members don’t as they do not see any change in their condition. Although only 20 people choose to continue to treat the terminally ill patients, 27 people view that there will be change in their conditions if they continued the treatment.

Scenario 3 shows the agreement of 27 people increasing their consultant and treatment charges under the circumstance of maintaining their clinic and for the provision of remunerations.

In scenario 4 we can see that in order to be on ethically right, 29 people out of 43 have opted to take the initiative of reminding the Physical Therapist about the ethical guidelines of the profession, if violated but have not opted
to take the decision to inform about the same to the higher authority which shows low ability of some of the Physical Therapists to make the right ethical choice.

Going by the result and the analysis of the study, we can observe various apprehensions among the Physical Therapists under certain circumstances.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that complex ethical issues have emerged with the development of the profession.

These issues pose an important challenge to the clinician and require that he develop skill in making ethical judgements in professional practice.

The educational implication of this data is inescapable: in order to meet all the challenges of clinical practice, physical therapy students must be taught how to make ethical as well as clinical judgements.

Also in the view of maintaining the standards of the profession, it should made mandatory to make unavoidable rules to be followed by both therapists and the patients to prevent from any confusion and clouding in their minds.

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study was limited only to the Telangana state. Hence, further study is needed to analyse the complete ethical scenario of the profession by conducting further surveys among other states in country taking into consideration the other ethical scenarios which have not yet been discussed or discovered.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING:

The authors received no funding for this research project.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. Please write to vadivelk@srmist.edu.in, karulvela@gmail.com

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