HIGHER EDUCATION FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF BACHELORS OF PHYSIOTHERAPY – A NARRATIVE REVIEW

Mukta Deshpande

Assistant professor, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Department of Physiotherapy, Pune, Maharashtra

ABSTRACT:

Background:

Physiotherapy or Physical therapy is an enormous field that requires high level of knowledge and skill to sufficiently deliver effect rehabilitation. In most of the scenarios it takes about 7 years to attain degree of Masters of Physiotherapy. It is been noted that there is a population that stops opting for Masters of Physiotherapy. There are very few details available to us on as why physiotherapist doesn’t pursue higher education. Hence there was a need felt to find out the facilitators and barriers for choosing masters in physiotherapy. Many barriers and facilitators came into picture like lack of funding and development of expertise respectively. Dealing with barriers and further promoting facilitators for higher education should belooked after into.

I. INTRODUCTION:

“Physiotherapy is concerned with identifying and maximizing quality of life and movement potential within the spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment, habilitation and rehabilitation. A physiotherapist can not only be a part of post-surgical rehabilitation but also non-surgical rehabilitation”1. The conditions in which physiotherapy rehabilitation can be beneficial are in variety of areas including orthopedics, neurosciences, pediatrics, women’s health, cardiorespiratory, and sports. Rehabilitation in any condition is not restricted to reducing pain; it stretches to smooth functioning of day-to-day activities.2

Physiotherapist helps you build a good quality-of-life. Undergoing a rehabilitative process helps one gain the confidence, convictionofleading a normal life after a major physically traumatizing incidence. Physiotherapist requires undertaking a comprehensive assessment for formulating diagnosis and further designing the treatment programs 1.

For being a qualified physiotherapist, one needs to undergo an extensive course, which includesbachelors and masters of physiotherapy. Further, anyone can achieve PhD and Post-doctorate degrees, which varies according to one’s wishes.

The widely followed curriculum over most of the colleges in India for Bachelors of Physiotherapy (BPT) is for the duration of 4 ½ years 3. BPT is an extensive course covering all the basic subjects including anatomy, physiology, pathology, microbiology, surgery, medicine, etc. along with specialized subjects for physiotherapy. BPT helps to cover the base for rehabilitation.

Following this, the most common pattern followed for Masters of Physiotherapy (MPT) is a course duration of 2 years 4. MPT and BPT course duration is the same for Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, Maharashtra. MPT specialization comprises mainly into – orthopedics rehabilitation, sports rehabilitation, neurosciences, pediatrics rehabilitation, cardiopulmonary rehabilitation, women’s health and community rehabilitation.

Having a Master’s degree not only helps in clinical skills and evidence based practice, but also extends the scope of physiotherapist. Maitland in 1980 mentioned the need of specialized physiotherapist as the specialist having the most recent and specific knowledge about their field.5 Nevertheless, not all BPT students continue pursuing
higher education in the field of physiotherapy in India. Due to various reasons there are always some students that decide not to follow the pattern of ‘masters after bachelors’.

This aspect has been undervalued and there is a need felt to recognize this important feature. Moreover it is essential to discover what barriers and facilitators were faced by the physiotherapist to acquire Postgraduate degree. This would help us shed some light on important aspects of physiotherapist point of view.

II. METHODS

The purpose of this study is to review various articles to understand the perceived barriers and facilitators for pursuing higher education following completion of Bachelors of Physiotherapy.

MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science and PubMed databases were searched with masters, postgraduate, higher education, physiotherapy, physiotherapist and future scope as keywords. Last 15 years of published articles with English language were included.

III. DISCUSSION

The articles reviewed included from different countries like Australia, Canada, South Africa, United Kingdom, etc. All of the articles mentioned the views pertaining to their countries, with respect to their Physiotherapy associations; its drawbacks and advantages.

Barriers faced by Physiotherapist:

Most of the articles considered both sides of accomplishing MPT, facilitators and barriers. These facilitators and barriers were split into the personal or internal issues and external issues. Though the thought behind not achieving MPT degree seems to be very simple and ignorant pertaining to that physiotherapist; it’s not that simple and sorted. There can be a number of hindrances like lack of familiarity with regards to university. Unawareness or lack of knowledge about the right university or college relevant to the interest of study could be a barrier for commencing Masters level study.

Even if the therapist is well aware about the universities and different colleges offering MPT course, lack of financial support is another major struggles a physiotherapist faces. Physiotherapy as a profession is common to be female dominant, which brought into light familial commitments that restricted candidates to enrol for MPT. These commitments vary from being dependent on some family member to having some or all family members dependent on that therapist. Combination of lack of financial support and familial commitments further draws the therapist away from the goal of achieving MPT.

Geographic locality of universities or colleges has influenced a lot with regards to accessibility to the physiotherapist. It is very obvious that remote the locality, harder will it be for the student to travel. This brings into picture monetary crisis as well. Distance not only increases financial stress but also the anxiety of staying away from home. Having someone dependent on the physiotherapist; geographic location would play a crucial part.

Negative influences, emotions, and perceptions towards education, self-abilities, and personal experiences were recorded. This resulted in having an immense negative impact in some of the candidates. There were reports of candidates finding Master’s program unconnected to clinical applicability. Age and one’s own ability to complete MPT has been another barriers mentioned in a study. Helping overcoming these seems to be equally important concern. Moreover it was noted that candidates who had completed the post-graduation were more motivated and showed high level of self-confidence.

It was also noted that some of the participants were facing lack of employer support. As some candidates prefer taking up job after completing the BPT course, denial or insufficient support from organisation can further discourage the therapist on achieving new heights in their own career. Building a fear of being unemployed after completing post-graduation could be the worst fear for a budding physiotherapist. Having a supporting company could aid a physiotherapist having a good professional growth. Company could merely support students by giving preference to those who wish to complete the degree along with continued job. Stathopoulos noted an failure for recognition of candidates offering a superior expertise than other candidates. Such distress adds on to physiotherapist’s unemployment nightmares.
Facilitators faced by Physiotherapist:

Many physiotherapists have shown various rationales for opting for master’s program. The studies mainly highlighted the personal and external support that a therapist got in numerous ways.

Physiotherapist having a good acquaintance with institution or university or lecturer showed a positive impact on their mind. Along with acquaintances, accessibility of the same or similar institution lead to high uptake of students.

It was seen that when a physiotherapist is in the vicinity of a proficient, skilled and talented colleague or superior, lead them being more motivated for learning and thus taking up for higher education. Presence of a well-qualified physiotherapist has shown to have a great deal of encouragement to the students. Along with this a slight push from senior has shown to reflect positively on higher education of students.

Furthermore, remuneration raise with elevated odds of promotion after completion of MPT showed increased appreciation for taking up Master’s Program. Organization providing study leaves or job security for students undergoing Master’s program presented with more number of uptakes. This showed to have a positive influence on social and personal satisfaction of candidate.

There are institutions that make it mandatory for the employees being certified with MPT. This puts the institution and staff at a higher level, by inevitably being intellectual and skilled. Such organizations also have presented with making special arrangements in the way of study leaves and funding for candidates interested in achieving the same. Few studies indicated having a supportive colleague or employer, added to the encouragement of the therapist to accomplish greater heights.

Having a core drive for professional and personal growth, presented with high MPT completion rate. After completion of MPT, candidates showed an enormous boost in clinical expertise. These physiotherapists displayed a great deal of positive attitude and expectations. They were more interested in improvising skills and knowledge. These students showed optimistic response for the need of taking the talent or intelligence a level up. Fulfilment, improvement in patient care and treatment was also one of the facilitators seen. Having a decent monetary backing along with the hunger to achieve enhanced professional growth resulted in facilitating uptake of MPT.

Physiotherapists have described their personal experience of Master’s program as ‘life changing’, ‘huge confidence boost’ and ‘career changing’. Undoubtedly MPT improves one’s critical thinking, ability to handle critical situations as well as embracing tactical approach towards patient and institute. Ascertaining rulings with regards to professional degree accomplishment, aids institution and physiotherapist indisputably but considerations must be made through the physiotherapist point of view. Barriers faced by individual are not insignificant, with respect to funding, time and familial constrictions. A well-planned loan system drawn to aid physiotherapist will be beneficial. Along with this, there are still barriers concerning to unfamiliarity of different universities and colleges offering MPT program. A platform, department or guidance council formulating country specific prerequisites and eligibility requirements will be beneficial. With time there is definite spread of higher education pertaining to physiotherapy. As the barriers faced by physiotherapist will lessen, positive impact on higher education among physiotherapist will definitely be on rise.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Most common barriers faced by the therapist were lack of funding and lack of support. Motivation, determination and development of expertise were the main facilitators described by physiotherapist.

Limitations:

All the studies considered in the review didn’t completely reflect Indian scenario. Most of the articles covered developed countries; hence barriers faced by that therapist would differ in context to Indian physiotherapist.

Future scope:

There is also a dearth in literature of studies reflecting Indian physiotherapist scenario. Understanding and correlating the facilitators and barriers faced by Indian physiotherapist is required. Furthermore, research should focus on reasons for Indian physiotherapist choosing a career field other than Physiotherapy.
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