

Perception of Tertiary Care Clients Toward the Availability of Physical Therapy Service at Primary Health Care Centers in Saudi Arabia: A Cross-sectional Survey

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Background

Primary health care (PHC) is the foundation of the health care systems. The contemporary concept of PHC as an organization identifies the values of multidisciplinary team collaboration. The need to integrate physical therapists with the multidisciplinary PHC team has been suggested. Physical therapy (PT) is frequently prescribed as the treatment of choice for various neuromusculoskeletal disorders covering a broad scope of patient population through safe and cost-effective conservative care.

Methods

We carried out a cross-sectional survey to establish, quantitatively, the participants' perspectives on the availability of PT service at PHC. In addition, we conducted a qualitative descriptive analysis, based on a secondary analysis of the open-ended survey data, using thematic content analysis to synthesize the participants' views on the availability of PT service within PHC.

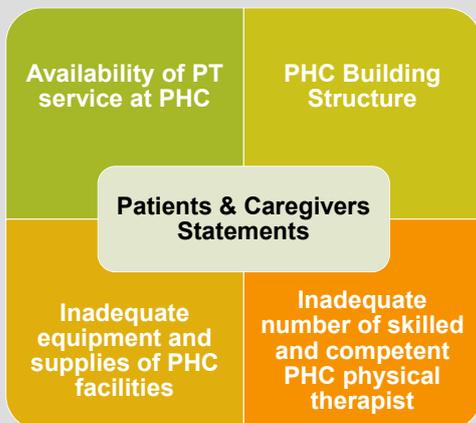
The survey was developed by the authors based on clinical experience and relevant literature. The first section was used to obtain socio-demographic details. The second section consisted of six 5-point items to obtain participants' perceived agreement with the potential advantages of PT service within PHC. The third section were open-ended questions intended to elicit participant's views on potential barriers or disadvantages of implementing such service.

Objectives

The aim was to explore the perception of Saudi clients regarding the potential availability of PT service at the PHC.

Results

total of 412 were eligible for analysis (57% females). Participants' mean age was 35.7 ± 21.9 years. Most of the participants were residents of Riyadh (67%). Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions were the frequent reason to seek PT service accounting for 38%. 75% of the participants preferred the availability of PT service at PHC centers neighboring their area of residence. There was no relationship between any of the demographic characteristics and level of support of PT availability at PHC ($p > .05$). The mean score of the perceived agreement regarding advantages of PT service at PHC was 24.1 ± 4.6 out of 30. Over 80% reported PT service at PHC help to treat their current health condition (Table). Married and participants with MSK conditions had a higher mean score of perceived agreement with advantages of PT at PHC ($p < .05$). Four major descriptive themes were identified central to participants' views of PT at PHC. A thematic diagram of the analytical framework is represented (Figure).



QUESTION	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Not sure n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)
Do you think the availability of PT service at PHC helps to treat your current health condition?	227 (55.4)	107 (26.1)	62 (15.1)	11 (2.7)	3 (0.7)
Do you think the availability of PT service at PHC reduces the need for additional radiological investigations and diagnostic testing?	115 (28.0)	114 (27.8)	131 (32)	42 (10.2)	8 (2)
Do you think the availability of PT service at PHC reduces your need for medication?	141 (34.5)	142 (34.7)	99 (24.2)	24 (5.9)	3 (0.7)
Do you think that the availability of PT service at PHC facilitates your access to health care instead of secondary or tertiary level care?	167 (41.6)	159 (39.4)	54 (13.2)	20 (5)	3 (0.7)
Do you think that the availability of PT service at PHC reduces the time and effort to follow up on your health condition?	213 (52.9)	138 (34)	38 (9.2)	15 (3.5)	1 (0.5)
Do you think that the availability of PT service at PHC has a role in the prevention of chronic diseases (non-infectious) i.e. CVD, overweight and diabetes?	147 (36.5)	126 (31.3)	113 (27.5)	16 (4)	3 (0.7)

Discussion

The study findings revealed PT to be perceived as a desirable and valuable service within PHC centers. This perception was supported with the participants' agreement with the multiple potential advantages of this service integration.

The results also reinforced that of previous studies, which showed the establishment of PT within PHC resulted in high levels of satisfaction among patients and primary care physicians. Thus, the development of PT service at PHC appears to be an essential and much sought-after innovation in health care provision in Saudi Arabia.

However, the key cited barrier to this integration was the lack of competent PT professionals and adequately equipped facilities.

How to improve ?

The strategic objectives of the Saudi health care transformation program are to enhance health care services quality and efficacy, access facilitation, and prevention of health risks. These objectives can be enhanced through this suggested model of PT service integration at PHC.

Conclusions

The results demonstrated high positive support for integrating PT service at PHC centers in. However, challenges and barriers identified require attention when model of care is to be established

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