

SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANT OF HEALTH IN PT PRACTICE

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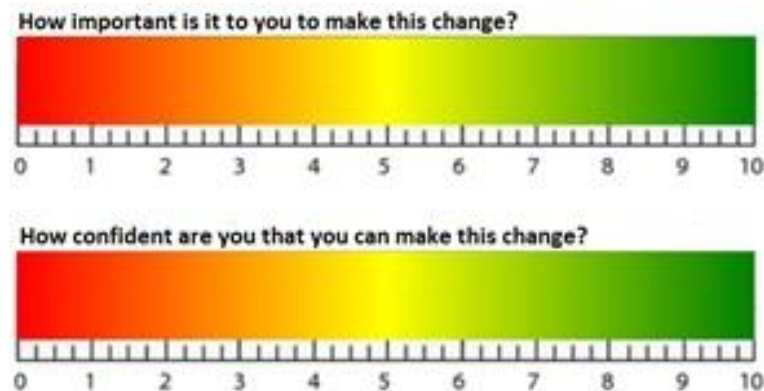


The Women's Health Division Valentine's Day Challenge was created as a small effort to address a massive healthcare challenge: supporting the health & wellness of individuals who are adversely affected by the socioeconomic determinants of health. Factors such as income and income distribution, education, unemployment and job security, employment and working conditions, early childhood development, food insecurity, housing, social exclusion, social safety network, health services, aboriginal status, gender, race, and disability have been identified as key factors that impact the health of Canadians (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Moreover, research shows that people who are adversely affected by these socioeconomic factors have significantly worse health outcomes than those who are not. Here are a few examples relevant to women's health (PHAC, 2013; Wilkins et al., 2007):

- While women live longer than men, they are more likely to experience depression, chronic stress, chronic health conditions such as arthritis and allergies, and injuries and death resulting from family violence.
- While cancer death rates for men have declined, they have remained consistent for women – mainly due to increases in lung cancer mortality (teenage girls are now more likely to smoke than teenage boys).
- Canadian women who live in the nation's wealthiest neighbourhoods live, on average, almost two years longer than those in the nation's poorest neighbourhoods.

Relevance to Physiotherapy Practice

As direct access healthcare providers, physiotherapists are a key point of contact for individuals who may be at risk of losing income or job security due to an injury, people who are experiencing social exclusion associated with chronic pain or illness, people who lack the education necessary to understand how to maintain good health, and many other individuals who are adversely affected by the socioeconomic determinants of health. All of us encounter opportunities to help people connect with health and social services that could help them better meet their basic needs, and in doing so, help them reduce their risk of future health challenges. As such, physiotherapists should ask their clients about the barriers they face in their efforts to maintain good health. What gets in the way of their efforts to eat well, sleep well, and exercise? Do they have consistent access to nutritious food, safe housing, and social support? Are they able to afford to attend multiple physiotherapy sessions, and finance the associated transportation, equipment, childcare, etc?



For many physiotherapists, these questions are not easy to ask. Below are two simple strategies for asking patients about socioeconomic factors that might impact their health & wellness:

- “Can you think of anything that might make it difficult for you to _____”? (attend physiotherapy appointments, do this exercise regularly, get out for walks, etc)
- “Many people find it difficult to _____ because of things like financial limitations, limited transport options, and busy schedules. Can you think of anything that might make it difficult for you to _____?”

- Try using a readiness to change scale/ruler:
- “On a scale from zero to ten, how confident are you that this [treatment plan] is going to work for you?” If a client responds with 7 or less, follow up by asking: “What made you choose X rather than a higher number?”, or “What do you think might prevent this plan from working for you?”

Strategies such as those listed above can help foster therapeutic alliance, facilitating a biopsychosocial approach to physiotherapy treatment, and a patient-centered approach to care. This month, let’s challenge ourselves to learn more about our patients’ socioeconomic realities, and to use the information we gain to improve the healthcare we provide



References

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