

**COVID-19 Quick Canadian Physiotherapist Survey:** Summary of the sixth (August 21-24<sup>th</sup> 2020) pan-Canadian survey of physiotherapists' experiences with COVID-19

On Friday August 21,<sup>st</sup> the BC-Primary Health Care Research Network launched Cycle 6 of the monthly COVID-19 Quick Canadian Physiotherapist Survey. An email invitation to participate was distributed to physiotherapists through provincial professional associations, as well as via Twitter and personal networks. The survey remained open until August 24 at 11:59pm PST.

**Main results: Virtual care has become firmly established in the profession and will likely be permanently integrated as one component of many physiotherapists' practices. The vast majority of those providing virtual care, plan to continue with it beyond the pandemic.**

- 58% of physiotherapists are continuing to offer virtual care.
- Of those providing virtual care, 95% reported they are now delivering both in-person care and virtual care; 84% plan to continue to offer virtual care beyond the pandemic.

**Physiotherapists are feeling on edge about potential COVID-19 surges in their region and the impact on their practices**

- 45% feel severe or moderate levels of anxiety, while another 34% feel mildly anxious
- Physiotherapists rated the current level of strain on their practice related to COVID-19 as an average of 3.1 on a scale from 1=no impact; 5=high impact

**Ongoing variability in physiotherapy caseloads, but overall lower caseloads compared to pre-COVID-19 levels**

- Physiotherapists are currently treating an average of 43% of their normal patient caseload
- 14% of physiotherapists reported no caseload
- 32% of physiotherapists reported treating 75% or more of their normal patient caseload

**Physiotherapists identified key areas for support:**

**Advocacy to support community-based physiotherapy to remain open in COVID-19 surges**

- Advocacy by national and provincial professional associations to governments for physiotherapy as an essential service including its role to aid in recovery from COVID-19 and management of other chronic conditions/injuries.

**Clear communication from colleges/health care leaders to physiotherapists**

- How to best manage their practices with increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases;
- Information on new emerging COVID-19 evidence (i.e. transmission, symptoms, management) to keep all safety protocols up to date for physiotherapists and patients.

**Creation of resources to enhance the quality of physiotherapy delivered by virtual care and promoting it as an available service delivery option to the public and other stakeholder groups**

- Resources for physiotherapists on effectiveness of virtual care and best practice for delivery including assessment and treatment approaches, logistics and caseload management strategies,

integration of both virtual and in-person care, and how to do group physiotherapy via virtual care.

#### **Physical and mental health safeguards for physiotherapists**

- Reliable access to quality PPE and consistent communication of guidelines from colleges/health authorities for what types of PPE should be used in different situations (i.e. mask vs. goggles vs. gloves)
- Access to counseling, mental health, and wellness support for physiotherapists

#### **Policy Recommendations**

As they prepare for potential surges of COVID-19 cases this fall, physiotherapists have identified specific areas for support from leaders in national and provincial governments, colleges, the professional association, and health authorities.

1. Advocacy for physiotherapy to be recognized as an essential health service for all Canadians
2. Clear communication of 1) how best to manage practices in an environment of increasing COVID-19 cases; 2) new evidence to ensure safety protocols are up to date for physiotherapists and patients
3. Development of resources for physiotherapists to be able to deliver high quality virtual care and articulating the option of virtual care to all stakeholders
4. Access to physical protection (i.e. PPE) and mental health services (i.e. counseling support)

**Sample:** 351 physiotherapists responded from across Canada. Every province was represented with the greatest participation from British Columbia (42%), Ontario (27%), and Quebec (15%). The majority (78%) of physiotherapists reported working in private practice with 39% owning their clinic. Public practice physiotherapists made up 19% of the sample. Over three quarters (82%) of respondents identified as women, over one quarter (27%) reported working in a rural setting, 14% worked in a hospital, over half (51%) reported working as part of an interdisciplinary team, and 27% reported that more than half of their patients spoke English or French as a second language.