



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

Association
canadienne de
physiothérapie

Position Statement Patient Safety

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) believes that physiotherapists play an essential role in promoting a safer healthcare system for Canadians. CPA affirms that physiotherapists have an ethical, professional and regulatory responsibility for safety in all aspects of *patient** care. Their responsibility goes beyond direct interaction with the patient to the health setting and *systems level* within which care is provided. CPA supports physiotherapists in contributing to a culture of safety for users and providers of the Canadian healthcare system.

BACKGROUND

The Canadian Patient Safety Dictionary defines patient safety “as the reduction and mitigation of unsafe acts within the healthcare system, as well as through the use of best practices shown to lead to optimal patient outcomes.”¹ The National Steering Committee on Patient Safety (Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada), asserts that “Safety is a fundamental aspect of quality healthcare. To improve safety, the healthcare system must develop, maintain and nurture a culture of safety.”² Adverse events are an important indicator of patient safety in hospital settings. In Canada, adverse events were estimated by Baker and colleagues at 185,000 per year with over one third of these deemed potentially preventable.³

The Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI), founded in 2003 as an independent organization, has a national mandate to promote a safer health system for Canadians. Their vision is described as, “... a Canadian health system where patients, providers, governments and others work together to build and advance a safer health system; where providers take pride in their ability to deliver the safest and highest quality of care possible; and where every Canadian in need of healthcare can be confident that the care they receive is the safest in the world.”⁴ CPA's partnership with CPSI demonstrates a commitment to the promotion of this culture of safety within the Canadian healthcare environment.

As health professionals, physiotherapists inherently value improvement of health and function for patients. Physiotherapists provide care in a holistic manner, making safety integral to both preventing harm and improving

¹ Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Canadian Patient Safety Dictionary. October 2003: p.12

² National Steering Committee on Patient Safety. Building a Safer System – a National Integrated Strategy for Improving Patient Safety in Canadian Health Care. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. 2002: p. vii

³ Baker GR, Norton PG, Flintoft V, Blais R, Brown A, Cox J, et al. The Canadian adverse events study: the incidence of adverse events among hospital patients in Canada. CMAJ 2004;170(11):1678-86

⁴ Canadian Patient Safety Institute. About Us. Available at: <http://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca/about.html>. Accessed October 16, 2007.

outcomes. CPA believes that patient safety is fundamental in all areas of physiotherapy practice, from the assessment and interventions provided to the patient, to the physical environment within which the patient receives care to the context and healthcare system within which care is provided.

ROLE OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Although patient safety is an area of shared responsibility among the patient, public, other healthcare providers and the system, physiotherapists should be fully informed of their accountability for patient safety within the practice environment. Regardless of payment structure, area of practice, geographic location, practice setting, regulatory structure, or provincial/territorial health system, the physiotherapist's responsibility for patient safety is integral to patient care and delivery of physiotherapy services.

Individual Responsibilities

Physiotherapists demonstrate accountability for patient safety at the individual level (patient-physiotherapist) by maintaining competency to practice, working toward best practice, communicating appropriately and effectively with the patient and related healthcare providers, as well as through attention and adherence to appropriate safety and infection control practices.

Systems Level Responsibilities

Physiotherapists demonstrate accountability for patient safety at the system level through practice that is appropriate to the physical environment and organization, as well as through a proactive approach that seeks to create systems that help identify and report unsafe situations prior to the occurrence of an adverse event in accordance with provincial privacy legislation.

While safety is of unquestionable importance in patient service delivery, there are situations when physiotherapists may have to assess and manage the risks involved in applying an intervention, in order to achieve optimal outcomes (e.g. improving the mobility of individuals with neurological and/or balance impairments). In other situations a physiotherapist may decide to decline to provide healthcare services to a patient in order to prevent harm to the patient and/or others. CPA recognizes that such situations exist and that physiotherapists may need to seek clarification from their provincial regulatory colleges.

The CPSI has created a Safety Competencies Framework for health providers which consists of the following elements: creating a culture of patient safety, working as a team, communicating effectively, using safe strategies to enhance practice, managing human factors and cognitive processes, managing high-risk situations and responding to an adverse event.⁵ CPA supports physiotherapists in communicating adverse events to their patients and others as appropriate using the National Guidelines for the Disclosure of Adverse Events⁶ to guide these discussions/interchanges.

CONCLUSION

CPA is dedicated to the promotion of a culture of safety within the Canadian healthcare system and views physiotherapists as essential contributors to a safer health system for Canadians. CPA is committed to supporting and promoting physiotherapists in this role through disseminating information related to safety issues, risks and threats; providing website resources to members; reinforcing the standards related to safety in the CPA accreditation program; supporting partnership activities with the CPSI; and supporting best practices and research initiatives related to this critical area.

⁵ Canadian Patient Safety Institute. Safety Competencies Framework. Available at: <http://www.patientsafetyinstitute.ca/education/safetycompetencies.html>. Accessed October 16, 2007.

⁶ Canadian Patient Safety Institute. Draft Guidelines for the Disclosure of Adverse Events. 2007 May.

GLOSSARY

Adverse events “unintended injuries or complications resulting in death, disability or prolonged hospital stay that arise from health care management” Baker GR, Norton PG, Flintoft V, Blais R, Brown A, Cox J, et al. The Canadian Adverse Events Study: the incidence of adverse events among hospital patients in Canada. CMAJ 2004;170(11):1678-86.

*Patient

The word patient is used throughout this document to indicate patient, client, and family member and/or substitute decision maker (where applicable). Physiotherapists should always adhere to applicable privacy and consent regulations/legislation in their jurisdiction when interacting with the above mentioned individuals.

*Systems level

Systems level refers to the physiotherapist within the context of the broader health care system and /or practice environment. A system is an interdependent group of items, people, or processes with a common purpose.⁷ This includes the physical environment, the geographic location, access patients have to the service, organizational structure, policies, procedures and processes within the immediate workplace and the broader regulatory framework within which the physiotherapist works.

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