Approximately 50% of all Canadians are living with at least one chronic health condition.\(^1\) Many of these patients are receiving team-based primary health care, where they can benefit from accessing a wide range of providers, including physiotherapists, for management and prevention of future health problems.

**Role of Physiotherapy in Chronic Disease**

Research strongly supports the role of physiotherapists in the prevention, treatment and management of chronic diseases, including hypertension, emphysema, Type 2 diabetes, Parkinson’s, arthritis and obesity. Physiotherapy interventions, including exercise prescription, facilitate patient participation in programs that enhance and maintain physical well-being which has a significant impact on quality of life (QOL) and future use of health care services.

**Impact on Patient Experience**

Physiotherapy interventions for chronic disease prevention and management, including exercise prescription and education, take into account the individual’s medical condition and needs.\(^2\)

Patients report that physiotherapy management of their chronic conditions results in:

- Decreased pain and shortness of breath, or dyspnea.\(^3\)
- Increased confidence and commitment to exercise, which positively impacts health-related QOL.\(^4\)
- Enhanced social interaction, also improving QOL.\(^2\)

**Impact on Population Health**

Exercise is essential in the prevention, management and treatment of chronic diseases.\(^5\)

- Physiotherapy interventions target mobility and improve QOL for individuals with chronic diseases and conditions such as multiple sclerosis, chronic heart failure and lymphedema related to breast cancer.\(^6,7,8\)
- Physiotherapist-supervised inpatient exercise rehabilitation reduces physical impairment and improves functional ability and exercise capacity in individuals with Type 2 diabetes.\(^9\)
- Physiotherapy programs enhance and maintain physical well-being for those with chronic conditions.\(^2\)
Impact on Health Care Costs

Chronic disease prevention programs that focus on exercise, education and self-management strategies reduce future use of health care resources.

- Physiotherapy assessment and individualized exercise program strategies with telephone follow-up reduces the number of emergency visits, and hospital emergency and health service utilization.\(^\text{10}\)

- Physiotherapy management of chronic diseases, such as osteoarthritis, alleviates wait times for physician services by addressing pain and functional issues and reduces the need for more costly surgical interventions.\(^\text{11}\)

- Patient self-management of chronic conditions is an efficient, effective, and sustainable use of health care resources.\(^\text{1}\)

Summary

There is strong evidence that physiotherapy interventions, including exercise prescription and self-management support, are effective in the prevention and management of chronic conditions.

Key References:


2. Valuation of Physiotherapy Services in Canada; CPA report using MCDA analysis for determining value of physiotherapy services; Mitton G; Dionne F. 2012.


The value of a health care service is more than its proven cost-effectiveness. Quality of life, access, and continuity of care and integration of services are equally important criteria when looking at the broader concept of value.