

LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Community Physiotherapy in India - Students' Perspective

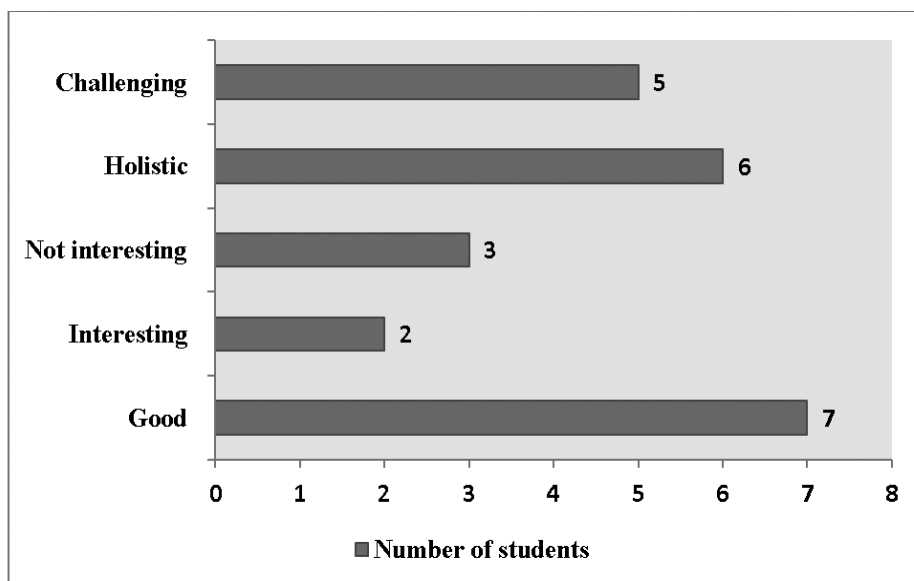
The existing physiotherapy curriculum in developing countries (especially in Africa) is inadequate to prepare the under-graduate physiotherapy student to work in the field of community-based rehabilitation (Mostert-Wentzel et al, 2013). The situation in India is similar (Rajan, 2012). While certain insights have been provided (through interviews and magazine articles) into improving the current status of physiotherapy education in India (Rajan, 2015), published research in this field continues to be scarce. It has been seen that students who enrol in the programme generally wish to pursue higher education in physiotherapy (Jain et al, 2011). This could indicate that there is interest in pursuing physiotherapy as a profession, and students are looking to gain more knowledge through higher studies. However, the number of students who wish to specialise in community physiotherapy is much smaller, as the usual preferences are institution-based physiotherapy specialisations (Jain et al, 2011).

A pilot survey was conducted among third year and final year students at a private physiotherapy college in Pune, a city in Maharashtra State, India. The tool for the survey was an anonymous self-administered questionnaire. Twenty-seven students (one male) consented to participate in this survey. The average age was 20.6 years, with 49% being third year students. Seven students wished to work for at least 1 year before deciding whether to pursue higher studies. Of the remaining 20 students who wished to pursue higher education in physiotherapy immediately after their undergraduate studies, there was an equal distribution among third year and final year students. Only 1 student wished to pursue post-graduate studies in community physiotherapy. The preferred specialisations among most of the students were musculoskeletal health (35%) and musculoskeletal and neurological health (35%). Two students were unsure about their preferences. The year of study did not have an influence on the choices made by the students, as the distribution for the preferences remained the same across both years.

The students were also asked their views about community physiotherapy as a field of specialisation (Figure 1). There were conflicting responses. Since multiple

responses were given by each student, the total number of responses did not add to 27. This confusion was also noted in certain responses given by the students. One of the final year female students said, "I want to pursue my Master's. Also, my parents want me to do it". In the words of another final year student, "...To be a community physiotherapist, one needs to be very good in social work and it involves treatment which is very general and even a common man knows... however it has a very good scope as it involves many branches".

Figure 1: Views regarding Community Physiotherapy as a field of Specialisation



The confusion about community physiotherapy was evident among this cohort of students. While 70% of the students wished to pursue other specialisations, there were more positive than negative responses about community physiotherapy. This could mean that the students are unclear about the scope of this specialisation. It may be due to inadequate undergraduate training opportunities, as evidenced by the dearth of physiotherapy colleges offering community physiotherapy as a specialisation, in the state of Maharashtra. This unfortunately could lead to a vicious cycle, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The cycle of Community Physiotherapy in India



In conclusion, community physiotherapy in India does not get the required attention. The need for this specialisation is on the rise; there is however no commensurate rise in the number of community physiotherapists. An environment conducive for students to pursue this specialisation could help increase their numbers and eventually create a sufficient pool of mentors and specialists.

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