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Research Article

PHYSIOTHERAPY AWARENESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS- CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The physiotherapists facilitate optimum functional independence, health and well being of the community. An idea of the range of conditions that a physiotherapist can treat will help the community to benefit from their skill. Primary school teachers play a key role in early diagnosis and prevention of disabilities in children. The objective of study was to assess the awareness of physiotherapy among primary school teachers in children.

Materials and method: A cross sectional survey using a validated questionnaire was conducted among 79 primary school teachers. The data were analyzed and described.

Result: 57% of the 74 respondents were not aware of the role of physiotherapy in many of the impairments and only 42% of the primary school teachers were informed during their training period regarding physiotherapy.

Conclusion: Awareness about physiotherapy among the primary school teachers who participated in the study was poor. Adequate awareness programs among the primary school teachers with regard to physiotherapy, through the various means of information transfer, can be beneficial in helping them to direct the parents who are in need of such services.

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INTRODUCTION

A health care profession concerned with human function & movement & maximizing its potential. It uses physical approaches to promote, maintain & restore physical, psychological & social wellbeing, taking account of variations in health status.³ The role of a physiotherapist is to deal with application of physiotherapy skills & knowledge to the assessment, design, delivery & evaluation of physiotherapeutic treatments in the management of the various conditions of acute or chronic sickness, disability or handicap.⁵

Physiotherapy attempts to address the illnesses, or injuries that limit a person's abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives.¹³ Physiotherapy is an essential part of health care delivery system.⁹ It is practiced independently of other health care providers and also within inter-disciplinary rehabilitation programs for the restoration of optimal function and quality of life in individuals with loss and disorders of movement.²² It is a non-surgical way of pain management, where various techniques are employed to provide instant or

gradual relief to the patients by total rehabilitation of body tissues and strengthening the muscles and joints.¹¹

Physiotherapists offer comprehensive care for patients with diverse medical and surgical conditions such as arthritis, burns, pain disorders, pediatrics disorders, pulmonary disorders, neurological disorders, cardiac disorders, trauma, and sport injuries.¹⁸ Physiotherapists are much needed in the field of medical and health as they can, in some cases, treat patients in a non-surgical way, but awareness about physiotherapy is rather poor.¹¹ A number of studies have been conducted to ascertain the general public's awareness and knowledge of physiotherapy.^{21,15}

However, due to lack of awareness, people usually resort to self-medication for instant pain relief and come to physiotherapist pretty late when orthopedics or other doctors refer them to physiotherapist. Patients are referred at a complex or advanced stage, when treatment becomes very difficult.¹¹

Physiotherapists are "first contact" practitioners like doctors. Many a time's patients and their family members believe that

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without a referral from a doctor they cannot consult a physiotherapist. The biggest misconception which prevails regarding physiotherapists is that they are masseurs (professionals who provide massage). Many studies have proven that physiotherapy can be more safer and economical option than any invasive form of therapy be it taking injections to relieve pain or surgery.¹²

Researchers have found that the public frequently confuses the functions of physiotherapists with those of other health professionals such as nurses, occupational therapist, speech therapist, radiographer and psychologists.² Schools are an ideal site for physical therapists to assume a leadership role in promoting increased participation in physical activity.⁶ The role of physiotherapist in general schools does not stop with children. This review has enlightened the physiotherapist directed occupational programme can forestall the deterioration of the physical health of school teachers.⁷ The school teachers are a good source who can help to create awareness among the public about the various rehabilitation facilities and the role played by physiotherapist. Although physiotherapists are happy to give advice to teachers, referrals must be done through the child's medical practitioner and it is advisable to discuss concerns with parents first. As part of the multidisciplinary team the physiotherapist is also asked to write a report as part of the statutory assessment which then will be used to draw up the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs if the child has any physical problems which impact on his/her access to the curriculum. In school the physiotherapist will advise the teacher and classroom assistant on the kinds of activities which will be helpful, e.g. exercise routines and games which could be done during P.E. lessons.¹⁰

Although physiotherapy has a great role to play in the society. The awareness regarding physiotherapy appears to be inclusive in our country due to lack of literature in this regard. Hence the extent to which the teachers understand about physiotherapist's role and for what specific ailment/complaint they reach physiotherapy need to be studied.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

A study was approved by the institutional ethical committee. A cross sectional survey was conducted in primary school teachers of different schools. The permission was sought to conduct the study from the principal of respected schools. Primary school teachers were asked to participate voluntarily. Participants have been included from the English medium school. Both males and females participants were included for the study. The questionnaire along with their consent form was given to the subjects falling in the selection criteria on their scheduled meeting dates, asking them to fill the consent form first. A total of 79 teachers were participated in this survey after obtaining informed consent. Once the consent form was filled, it was collected from the participants and he/ she further requested to fill the questionnaire.

A detailed self administered questionnaire was prepared with only closed ended questions in three sections. The final questionnaire was derived based on the opinions and consensus of these experts.

The final questionnaire contained both closed and open ended questions in three sections.

Section 1 required the background information that included name, age, gender, educational qualification, job designation, working location, population covered, when and where was the training given, duration of training, work experience (no of years) and contact no.

Section 2 required the details on the source of information about physiotherapy services.

Section 3 contained 8 open ended questions regarding the awareness about the various physiotherapy services.

Adequate time was given to complete the questionnaire. Once all the questions were answered, the questionnaire was collected on the spot from the participants. Out of 79 respondents 5 had not filled the questionnaire, so their forms were rejected. Data was analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

Data was analyzed in Microsoft Excel. Frequency of the answers were analyzed and calculated by means of percentage. In the study there were 13.51% males and 86.48% females.

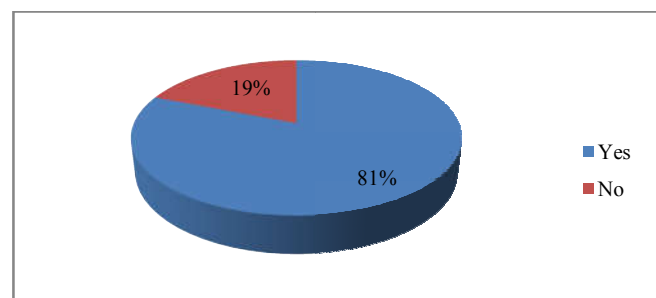


Figure 1 shows that how many primary teachers were aware about physiotherapy

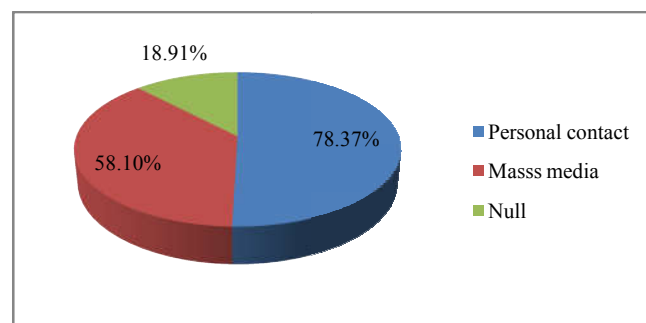


Figure 2 shows the source of information

In this 78.37% teachers were got information through personal contacts, while 58.10% teachers came to know about physiotherapy through mass media. On the other hand, 18.91% report that they have no source of information about physiotherapy.

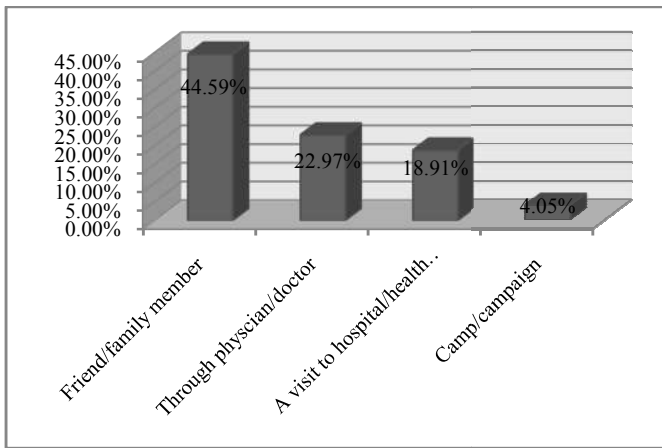


Figure 3 elaborate the details about personal contact

It shows that among 78.37% school teachers 44.59% got the information via friends or family member, 22.79% via physician or medical professionals, 18.91% via hospital or health centre and 4.05% got the information through camps/campaign.

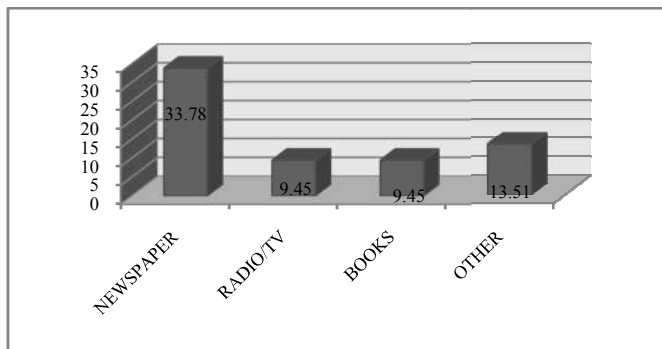


Figure 4 explain the detail of information via mass media in primary school teachers

It shows that among 58.10% teachers 33.78% got the information through newspaper, 9.45% through books, 9.45% through radio/television and 13.51% informed via other sources.

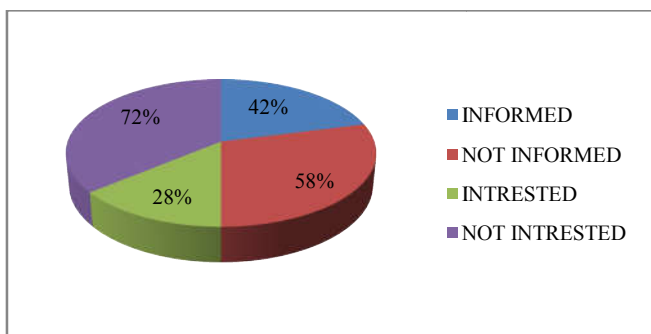


Figure 5 shows the percentage of teachers' information about physiotherapy during their training period

It suggests that on evaluation 42% teachers were informed and 58% teachers were not informed about physiotherapy during their training period. Among them 72% teachers were interested in learning about physiotherapy and 28% teachers were not interested.

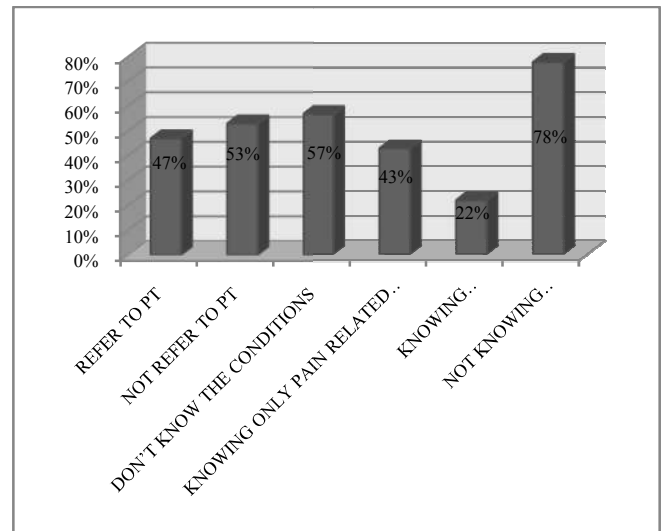


Figure 6 shows the percentage of referral to the physiotherapist and knowledge of physiotherapy

Only 47% teachers had referred the patients to the physiotherapist and guide them for physiotherapy while other 53% teachers had not referred anyone for physiotherapy. Out of the total 74 respondents, nearly 57% of the primary school teachers have written that they don't know which conditions can be managed by a physiotherapist. Other 43% have said that in pain related conditions like joint pain and muscular pain person should be send to the physiotherapist.

Only 5% of the responses received have said that patient should not refer to physiotherapist in condition like major injury, diabetes and fever. 78% of the primary school teachers didn't have an idea about what equipment or technique is used by a physiotherapist for treatment. Other 22% have said that hot pack, ultrasound, TENS, cold pack, current, IFT is used in physiotherapy.

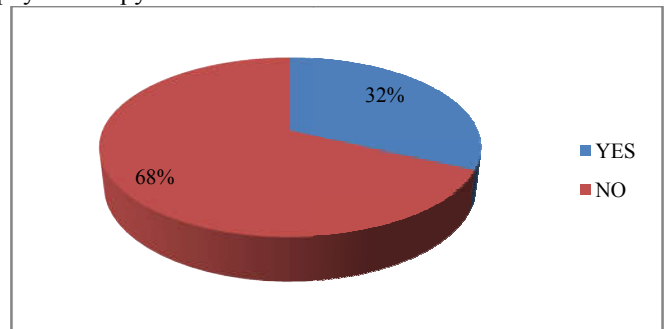


Figure 7 shows Age criteria for reference for physiotherapy treatment according to primary school teachers

32% of the primary school teachers were agreed that all age groups can be treated. 68% of the primary school teachers admitted that they didn't know which age groups of people can be treated by a physiotherapist. On the other hand, 7% out of them replied that only people up to 7 years and above, and up to 60-70 years can be treated by a physiotherapist.

34% of primary school teachers were aware of the nearest physiotherapy center in their locality. 65% don't know if there are any centers for physiotherapy nearby or in their locality. 1% of them said that no existence of centers or facilities for physiotherapy in their locality.

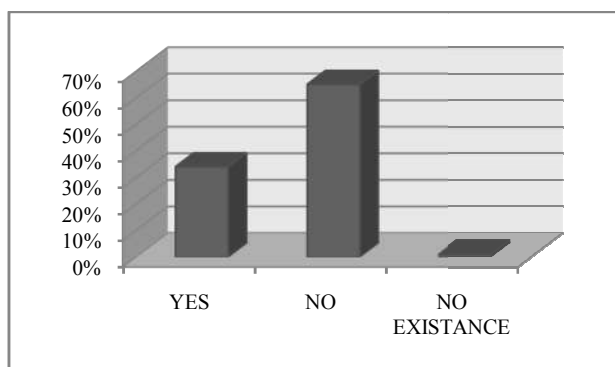


Figure 8 shows the nearest physiotherapy centre in their locality

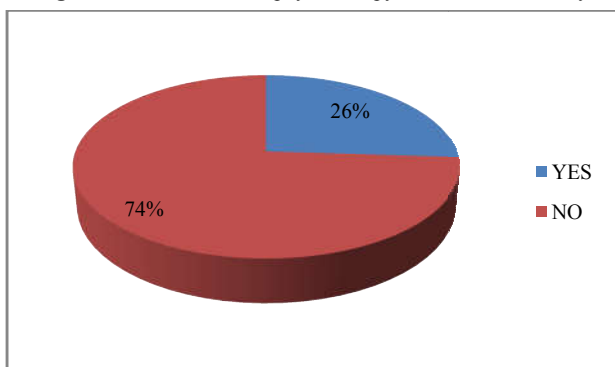


Figure 9 shows how to provide guidance for a person for physiotherapy

When asked about how a patient who requires physiotherapy will be guided by primary school teachers to a physiotherapy centre, 74% don't know how to obtain adequate physiotherapy services for a patient who required physiotherapist services. 26% of them responded said that they would guide them through address, contact number or by instructing them that it would be beneficial.

DISCUSSION

The study was carried out to find the awareness of physiotherapy among the primary school teachers in Surat, Gujarat. A main feature of this study was that the questions assessing awareness were asked as open ended questions which enabled the respondents to express their views freely. It has been understood from the literature that the primary school teachers can be a good source of creating public awareness about the various health care facilities and their adequate training helps in early identification and management of various impairments, thus preventing permanent disabilities^{4,16}. Some of the roles of primary school teachers are to organize formal education session. This implies that they can be a good source of public health education to a considerable number of the population and also refer the needy people to physiotherapy services. On analysis, it was observed that 81% of primary school teachers were aware of physiotherapy services and majority of them admit that they didn't know what conditions need to be referred to a physiotherapist. This situation could be improved if essential information is given regarding physiotherapy during their period of training. Only 42% teachers were informed about physiotherapy during their teaching training period. They were not aware about ergonomics, posture and child development. The leading sources of information among primary school teachers were friends or family members (44.59%). Other sources include

news paper (33.78%) and physicians (22.97%). This indicates that adequate information conveyed through medical professionals, hospital staff and family members can improve the awareness regarding physical rehabilitation facilities for the disabled, thus enhancing an accessible and affordable public health care.

Most surveys on the incidence of disability agree that the incidence of disability is higher in the pediatric age groups.¹⁹ However, The age criteria which some of the primary school teachers believe can be referred to a physiotherapist ranges that there is no age criteria. Thus, it is essential that the primary school teachers realize that physiotherapy can be adequately given to the physical disabled of any age group. In a handbook for parents of children with disabilities, it has been commented that 10% of Indian children below 14 years, that accounts for a staggering number of 30 million who have some kind of physical impairment. The available data also shows that only 5-10% of disabled children avail the benefits provided by the government. Therefore, it is necessary that primary school teachers know the various disabilities in children that can be managed by a physiotherapist.¹

Other significant finding that requires attention is that there is lack of awareness about how to guide a person to a physiotherapist if needed. From our study, it is clear that only a small fraction of the population is aware about the nature of work involved in physiotherapy. One of the reasons as to why many of the primary school teachers are not aware about adequate physiotherapy services is that there are no physiotherapy centers at an accessible distance and another significant finding that requires attention is that 74% of primary school teachers had lack awareness about how to guide a person to a physiotherapist if needed.

In this study, most respondents expressed the view that physiotherapists treat disorders of muscles, bones and joints. This could be attributed to the large number of the referrals from orthopedic units of the hospitals. Invariably, the small number of physiotherapists in the country might have limited physiotherapy referrals to mostly cases where the role of a physiotherapist is inevitable and most highly appreciated. In effect, the populace is only able to view physiotherapy services along the lines of mobilization of stiff joints and strengthening of weak muscles. Hence, it is not surprising that the public would not be aware that physiotherapy services could be available for conditions other than those of the musculoskeletal system.⁸ A similar observation was made by Ogiwara and Nozoe (2005) in a study among high school students in Japan.¹⁷ It was also evident from the results of this survey that a majority of the participants did not have a clear idea about the scope of physiotherapy. This situation is unlikely to change unless those who are in the profession of Physiotherapy work actively towards educating first, the mass media and then the general public through them. After all, half of the general public is dependent on mass media for acquisition of information on their health and illness.

Physiotherapy awareness is beneficial to the primary school teachers as it guides the teachers about computer and posture related ergonomics, back care of students, prevention of disorders in students as well as teachers. Habits or work

practices that are learned in early stage often continue into adulthood. If good work practices are established early, the likelihood of developing physical problems associated with computer use may be decreased. Early diagnosis of various disabilities in children will lead to good recovery. Physiotherapists as a part of the health care team plays an essential role in reducing the hospital stay, quick recovery and in rehabilitation for a better quality life.

Large population involving secondary and higher secondary school teachers can be covered in future for the same study. Adequate education and training with regard to physiotherapy can help improve public health utilization. Awareness created through the appropriate media will empower the primary school teachers to identify and refer patients with those health conditions which can be benefited from physiotherapy service and thus boost public health in India. A better awareness will also lead to better patient management and resource utilization.

CONCLUSION

The results show that, 81% teachers were aware about physiotherapy. Hence, only 43% teacher knew that which conditions should be referred to the physiotherapist, only 22% teachers knew about physiotherapy equipment. Only 32% said that there are no age criteria for physiotherapy. Only 26% had the idea about how to guide the patient for physiotherapy. So here it is proved that there is lack of awareness about physiotherapy in primary school teachers. Outcome of the present study also emphasizes the need of educating the primary school teachers on importance and usefulness of physiotherapy medical practice. 72% teachers were interested for further learning about physiotherapy.

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