

# Addressing the Challenges of Physiotherapy Education in India

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## ABSTRACT

The Healthcare sector in India is experiencing rapid growth, with both the Government and private sector making substantial investments in infrastructure and institutional mechanisms. This has elevated healthcare to become one of the largest sectors in the country. Physiotherapists form a significant segment of the healthcare service industry, playing a vital role in the backbone of Hospitals. Strengthening the physiotherapy workforce in India is crucial to deliver comprehensive care to patients and equip aspiring physiotherapists with updated knowledge and skills. To fortify the physiotherapy sector, it is imperative to enhance the quality of physiotherapy education. With the rapid advancements in techniques and machinery in recent years, physiotherapists working in clinical settings are expected to keep pace with new technologies and integrate them into patient care. This paper aims to shed light on the challenges faced in Physiotherapy Education in India and proposes strategies to address them in the upcoming decades. The paper advocates for the significance of entrance exams as a means to enter physiotherapy courses, the streamlining of physiotherapy education, an increased emphasis on research, it also underscores the importance of the dual role of a Physiotherapist as an educator in a Physiotherapy institute and as a clinical practitioner in a hospital, enabling them to impart the latest healthcare technologies to their students. Ultimately, the paper aims to provide a roadmap for restoring the esteemed position that the physiotherapy profession deserves in India.

**Keywords:** Physiotherapy Education, Health care, Research, Roadmap

## INTRODUCTION

The Physiotherapy profession in India has made tremendous progress culminating in the Allied and Health Professionals Commission Bill. The bill is a significant milestone in understanding independence and importance of the physiotherapists in the health sector. However, it is important to comprehend how ready this profession is to operate as one unit with such autonomy by looking at the current landscape of

Physiotherapy education across India. In healthcare, Physiotherapy has become very crucial, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where we have seen great contributions from these specialists. Hence, development of physiotherapy education at the beginning of 21st century paved the way for specialization within its scope.<sup>[1]</sup> Now there are more Indian universities currently offering doctoral programs in physiotherapy due to advancement on the career ladder. King Edward

Memorial Hospital (KEM) located in Mumbai would be remembered as a vanguard since it had been supported by WHO when establishing a school for physical therapy for the first time ever.<sup>[2]</sup> This was followed by another pioneering effort in Chennai that introduced a three-year degree program in physiotherapy at Government General Hospital. Therefore, Mr Jacques led this institution that developed a two-year Diploma Program of Physiotherapy marking an important turning point. Then, another physical therapy school was started up in Chennai at the Government General Hospital offering a three-year degree program starting 1975-76 academic year. Today, the scenario has significantly changed with around 450 colleges in India offering bachelors & Masters of Physiotherapy courses.<sup>[3]</sup> This expansion is an indication that this profession is slowly gaining recognition within India's health care system.

### **CURRENT INDIAN SCENARIO**

In India, many students in higher secondary education are unaware of the diverse physiotherapy courses offered by prestigious colleges & universities. Even when they are informed about these programs, their motivation to pursue a career in physiotherapy is often influenced by concerns about lower pay and job security. Despite the dedication and effectiveness of physiotherapists, they frequently encounter limited opportunities for professional growth and advancement within organizations, despite bearing significant responsibilities in patient care with minimal decision-making authority.<sup>[4]</sup> Physiotherapists in India often have fewer opportunities to diversify their roles compared to professionals in other fields, potentially leading to a monotonous career path. This lack of variety can diminish their enthusiasm for embracing new challenges, responsibilities, or roles. The

representation of Physiotherapists in administrative positions within healthcare facilities are notably low. It is crucial for physiotherapists in all settings to advocate for their profession, seeking greater acknowledgment and avenues for progress.

Physiotherapy is a multifaceted discipline that encompasses a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, empathy, and passion. However, many physiotherapy colleges in India may not excel in providing comprehensive education and clinical exposure with a compassionate and motivational approach.<sup>[5]</sup> To establish India as a global leader in the field of physiotherapy, it is essential to strengthen the foundation of this esteemed profession and prioritize holistic education and training for aspiring physiotherapists.

### **CHALLENGES**

#### **1. Lack of consistency in the curriculum**

Given that India is a developing country, some states excel in providing Physiotherapy education while others have health sciences universities offering the same course to affiliated colleges within the state. However, there is a lack of uniformity in curriculum across states, with variations from university to university. To address this challenge, a centralized curriculum should be developed and implemented, aiming for "one nation one curriculum."<sup>[1]</sup>

#### **2. Absence of Parent Hospital**

Some Physiotherapy colleges in India and especially private ones do not have parent hospitals. Having a parent hospital is a must for any physiotherapy college as it helps to guide trainees through different processes. By doing this, the students improve their practice by providing real-life experiences.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### **3. Common Entrance Examination**

The selection of students in physiotherapy colleges is not based on any common entrance exam like NEET. The selection process varies from state to state, there is a question regarding the selection process in private Physiotherapy institutions. Many recognized private institutions do not have a standardized selection

process for Physiotherapy courses. Students enrolled in various Physiotherapy courses are expected to meet the requirements of the curriculum. The absence of entrance tests for admission does not guarantee a well-trained Physiotherapist from these institutions.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### **4.Engaging with the Generation Z**

As we interact with Generation Z individuals born in the 20th & 21st century in the field of Physiotherapy Education, we encounter a cohort that is highly proficient in technology and expects their instructors to be the same. Known for their creativity, extensive social connections, and a preference for practicality, Gen-Z values realistic and modern ideas. In the realm of physiotherapy education, it is imperative to move away from outdated techniques that may no longer be relevant, such as obsolete treatment methods. Instead, focusing on teaching contemporary, practical, and innovative approaches is essential to effectively engage and educate this generation of Physiotherapy students.<sup>[5]</sup>

### **STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN**

#### **1.Enhancing Physiotherapy Education**

In India, we offer programs such as Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPT), Master of Physiotherapy (MPT), and Ph.D. in Physiotherapy. Given the significant population that requires healthcare services, there is a growing demand for skilled professionals in clinics, hospitals, and academic institutions. The differences in the working styles of a Physiotherapy graduate and a Master Degree holder within the same department can impact patient care and overall observations. To bridge this gap and standardize the practice of Physiotherapy, there is a need to streamline the Physiotherapy education system in the country.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### **2.Focus on Research**

Research stands as a cornerstone in the curriculum of Physiotherapy education. The Bachelor of Physiotherapy program equips students with the necessary skills to conduct, analyze, and document research articles. Research serves as a pivotal avenue for expanding knowledge, shedding light on the unknown, and inviting innovative ideas. It empowers individuals to seek answers to unresolved queries, disseminate findings, and contribute to the global pool of knowledge. Engaging in research not only broadens critical thinking but also propels the profession forward. Encouraging physiotherapists to engage in writing and conducting research is essential to uplift the physiotherapy community in our country. Providing financial support for their studies and facilitating publication avenues are crucial steps. Physiotherapists can present their research in conferences, seminars, and apply their findings in their daily practice. Motivating physiotherapists towards competency-based and outcome-based education fosters continuous learning and professional growth.<sup>[1,3]</sup>

#### **3.Combined function**

For enhancing teaching practices in Physiotherapy education, it is essential for physio educators to possess up-to-date knowledge. Faculty members without hands-on experience in clinical settings and limited exposure to real patient care may struggle to effectively impart practical knowledge. For instance, an educator with a background in both clinical practice and teaching can offer more relevant examples to students, facilitating a deeper understanding of concepts compared to those with solely academic experience. Therefore, a model that combines the roles of a clinical therapist and educator is recommended for the comprehensive training of physiotherapy students. This approach enables students to be mentored by individuals who are actively engaged in both clinical practice and academic instruction, equipping them with a thorough

understanding of current technologies and societal issues.<sup>[2,4]</sup>

#### 4. Adult learning

In Physiotherapy education, it's important to apply adult learning principles. Understanding that each student is unique, with their own learning pace, is crucial when teaching Gen-Z students. Teachers should avoid comparing students and instead foster a supportive environment. Providing real-life examples and encouraging students to analyze situations can boost critical thinking and engagement. Assigning capable students as tutors and grouping slower learners together can be beneficial. Time-bound topics and assessments tailored to individual learning speeds can help all students progress. By promoting student tutorship, educators aim to cultivate leadership, improve communication skills, share knowledge, and create a positive learning atmosphere.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

In India, the field of physiotherapy education needs improvement in various aspects like selecting suitable students, creating a conducive learning atmosphere, having skilled teachers, promoting research, offering continual education, and more. The main aim is to provide comprehensive care to patients and enhance the quality of physiotherapy education in both public and private institutions. Although progress has been slow, we anticipate significant

advancements in physiotherapy in the upcoming years in India.

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