From research to practice: Enabling healthcare professionals to promote a physically active lifestyle to people with spinal cord injury

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Introduction

- People with spinal cord injury (SCI) are largely inactive
- Physiotherapists key messengers for physical activity (PA) & health promotion
- Valued and trusted by people with SCI
Physio 14: Physios are the exercise specialists of choice, delegates say

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Some universities in England are increasing the amount of time students spend learning about helping patients to exercise, several hundred delegates attending a debate on the second day of the conference heard.

The great debate: Are physiotherapists the exercise specialists of choice for people with long-term conditions? Photo: Simon Hadley
Spinal cord injury & physical activity

- **Purpose**
  - Explore what physiotherapists in SCI rehabilitation think about PA for people with SCI and what they do in relation to promoting PA

- **Method**
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - 18 neurological physiotherapists (2-22 years’ experience)
  - Inductive thematic analysis
1) Perceived importance of physical activity

- Well-being, physical health, preventative medicine, quality of life
- Tacit knowledge practical experience
Theme 1

The problem is physios are not trained to properly fitness train a patient. A sports therapist may have learnt to get someone fit, but I believe in spinal cord injury there are not many physios who can just take a patient to the gym and give them fitness training that would work for them. It is not part of their obvious route. It is not yet in the culture that physical activity is something the physios should be doing.
Theme 2

2) Hit and miss physical activity promotion
   - Active PA promotion largely absent
   - Barriers in rehabilitation and community
And then there are other patients that you just never see other than occasionally in their one-to-one session. And then it’s like how do you get to those patients that aren’t really doing anything? And then it’s hard because there is part of me that thinks well they might never have been to a gym before... I think there’s a limit on what you can do, if they’re not bothered what are you going to do to make them do that (physical activity)?
Theme 3

3) Unease with activity-based rehabilitation
   - Good idea in theory
   - Conflict with rehab and concern with messages promoted
You have to be careful because you don't know where down that scale of adjustment and coping they are at and it can be **dangerous**.

Interviewer: What do you see as those dangers?

I guess the dangers to me are that you are misinforming patients of **unrealistic expectations** and you could be setting them up for a crash. You know they've already had a life changing traumatic event, you don't want them to build all their hopes, all their **expectations... on a potential false hope.**
Knowledge translation

Macro
- Government & Policy
- Specific guidelines for PA and SCI

Meso
- University & academia
- Physiotherapy degree courses

Micro
- Spinal rehabilitation units
- Training & communication
References


Thank you

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