

Direct access to physical therapy in the community - preferred model of care

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Abstract

In Israel, as in many western countries, the health care system is facing many complex challenges, including demographic changes, increased demand for services, and limited human and economic resources, which were highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. To enable the system to continue to provide optimal and timely services to the public, it must optimize use of all resources. In the last two decades, several countries called for judicious use of all health care professions, as well as extending their scope of practice, in order to increase the number of service providers and expand the services available to the public. This article emphasizes the need to expand the use of physical therapists as first-contact practitioners in the field of musculoskeletal medicine in the community and presents supportive evidence from the scientific literature. In the authors' opinion, direct access to physical therapy, as well as an extended scope of practice of physical therapists, will benefit everyone - the patients, the community health care services, and the profession. The intention of the article is to stimulate discussion of these issues among physical therapists and leaders of the profession in Israel, and to examine to what extent they should be promoted and by which means.

Keywords: physical therapy, direct access, professional status, first contact practitioner, musculoskeletal medicine

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