Profiling the General Medicine Physiotherapy service delivery models across major acute metropolitan

hospitals within Australia

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BACKGROUND: Physiotherapy (PT) is vital in the management of General Medical patients. However it is often felt that physiotherapy services are understaffed resulting in busy caseloads, potential for inadequate delivery of physiotherapy, staff fatigue and burn out. There is a paucity of research regarding General Medical physiotherapy workforce allocation.

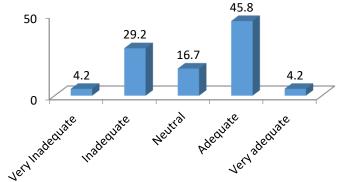
AIMS: To investigate physiotherapy service delivery for General Medicinal wards in major acute Australian hospitals and to investigate staff satisfaction.

METHODS: Australian metropolitan hospitals with a General Medical Unit were eligible for inclusion. Physiotherapy department managers from 51 eligible hospitals were approached and those interested invited their staff to complete a 40-item online survey. Data are reported as mean ± standard deviation or median [inter-quartile range].

RESULTS:

- 42 out of 51 hospitals were able to be contacted and 28 completed the survey (66% response rate)
- The number of beds allocated to General Medical patients in these hospitals was 89 ± 54
- 86% of respondents had a designated General Medical ward
- The total PT EFT in General Medicine was 3.4 ± 1.8

Figure 1: Perceived adequacy of staffing (%)



- Grade 1's were the most common PT classification, with 1.5 [1.0-2.3] per hospital
- 33% of respondents perceived they had inadequate staffing (Figure 1); and therapists noted increases in patient numbers without associated increases in PT staffing
- The physiotherapists' daily caseloads were 15
 [14 18] patients; and they routinely provided
 treatment to 11 ± 2.5 patients per day
- There was a moderate relationship between a greater number of hospital beds and an increased number of patients seen by PT per day (rho=0.534, p=0.011)
- 100% of respondents reported seasonal increases in workload but only 2 sites (7%) reported associated increased seasonal PT EFT

- 44% of hospitals had a weekend physiotherapy service specifically for general medical patients
- Patients awaiting slow stream rehabilitation were treated on 2.5 [2.0-3.0] times per week and those awaiting fast stream rehabilitation were treated 3.0 [2.0-4.0] times per week
- Physiotherapists spend the majority of their daily clinical time assessing and retraining gait, prescribing gait aids and discharge planning.
- Only 16% provided group therapy and 21% did not have an Allied Health Assistant
- 67% reported insufficient gait aids, with aids predominantly purchased by the PT departments
- 78% of respondents reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their job

DISCUSSION: This project has established the profile of Physiotherapy service delivery across major metropolitan hospitals within Australia. Grade 1's are the most common therapist working in this area. Despite documented challenges with staffing, equipment and non-clinical demands, most therapists felt satisfied with their job. Further work needs to be completed to determine the optimal PT service delivery model for general medicine.











