

Implementation of an Advanced Scope of Practice Physiotherapist in Neurosciences Clinics improves patient access to community services.

Jan Quiney, Lucinda Marr, Samantha Plumb and Scott Edwards, Physiotherapy Department, Royal Melbourne Hospital.

AIM: To investigate if the implementation of an advanced practice physiotherapist (APP) within three neurosciences outpatient specialist clinics improves patient care by addressing unmet physical need and satisfaction.

METHOD: Prospective implementation study. APP roles were implemented in three Neurosciences specialist outpatient clinics (Stroke, Neuro Oncology and Neuromuscular). An APP worked alongside the usual specialist medical staff. Quality of care data included number of patients seen; interventions performed (including referrals to community services); and patient and medical staff satisfaction.

RESULTS: Over 4 months, 126 patients were seen by the APP across the 3 clinics (equivalent to 378 per annum). Main interventions included: patient education/advice (73-100%); exercise prescription (50-92%); linking to community services (8-56%) referral to community physiotherapy (27-56%); referral to other community Allied Health discipline (8-33%). All clinic medical staff (100%) believed the APP addressed the physical needs of their patients (rated 10/10) and were supportive for an ongoing role. Patient satisfaction was high, with 100% of respondents (n=9) reporting that the APP assessment benefited them, and addressed all identified problems (44%). Over 69 hours of medical consultant time was freed up by APP over the four months.

All of the patients seen by the APP were discussed with the consultant directly with regard to medical and surgical progress. The patients whose neurological conditions were predominantly managed in the outpatient medical setting were assessed and identified for intervention by community therapists to address physical need which may have otherwise gone unmet. Patients whose neurological condition required an inpatient stay, but their needs were not identified or present at the time, were able to access community physiotherapy and other allied health services to address this unmet need. Specialised screening tools assisted with this assessment of unmet need.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS TO ALLIED HEALTH: The Advanced Practice Physiotherapist enabled the health service to be responsive to the complex unmet needs of the neurological patients alongside consultant medical staff in the outpatient setting. These needs were addressed at the time of the clinic and with referral to community therapists.

The role freed up consultant time, provides a career path for allied health and utilises existing expertise to provide timely and expert access to community services.

Table 1. Clinic Data of Patients Seen, Patient Demographics and Interventions & Referrals Provided

	Stroke Clinic	Neuro-Oncology	Neuromuscular
Clinic Data			
Number of clinic sessions across 4 month intervention period	16	18	8
Average number of patients scheduled for clinic per session	17.9	22.6	12
Average number of patients screened with post stroke checklist per session	4.7	NA	NA
Total number of patients seen by APP across 4 month intervention period	75	26	25
Average number of patients receiving treatment by APP per clinic session	1.1	1.4	3.125
Basic Demographics of Patients Seen by APP			
Average age	72.39	47.36	49.72
Sex	50% male	58% male	56% male
Patients of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CALD)	61%	61%	47%
Proportion of patients seen from rural areas	17%	16%	11%
Hospital, Community, Interventions and Referrals			
Proportion of patients seen who had an inpatient RMH stay over the preceding 12 months	100%	>90%	< 5%
Proportion of patients seen with no concurrent outpatient physiotherapy in the community	67%	66%	80%
Proportion of patients seen who were already waitlisted for physiotherapy in the community	6%	0	0
Proportion of patients seen who were already receiving physiotherapy in the community	22%	33%	20%
Proportion of patients seen who were subsequently referred to physio in community by APP	56%	27%	52%
Proportion of patients seen who were referred to other allied health input in the community	33%	8%	12%
Proportion of patients seen at clinics who saw specialist medical practitioner at same time	100%	96%	100%
Proportion of patients seen who received advice and education	100%	73%	92%
Proportion of patients who received exercise prescription by treating therapist	50%	73%	92%
Proportion of patients seen who received equipment prescription	0%	23%	0%
Proportion of patients seen where APP directly consulted with specialist medical practitioner	100%	100%	100%