The role of the physiotherapist in physical activity promotion

Background and goals of the study

1° PA & health
- Physical activity (PA) has multiple positive effects on health (Hardman & Stensel, 2003)
- Inactivity is hazardous to the health (Rippe, 2010)

2° PA promotion & Primary Care
- PA should have a stronger role in primary prevention. Primary care professionals should offer counselling and advice on PA and should be well trained to do so (Cavill et al., 2006)

3° Physiotherapist as PA promotor
- Physical therapists are ideally placed to promote health and well being through PA and exercise prescription. They should promote safe and healthy PA (Verhagen & Engbers, 2008). Seldom studies are focusing on their real involvement

4° Objectives
- To understand physiotherapists’ awareness about their PA promoting role
- To analyse actions undertaken by physiotherapists to promote PA

Determinants of physical activity

- 49.6% of the physiotherapists mentioned « health enhancement » as a reason to practice PA:
- Individual-level variables are mainly proposed as non practice reasons (42.3%):

Physiotherapist as a physical activity promotor

- 99 % of physiotherapists agree with their potential role in PA promotion
- Actions undertaken by physiotherapists to promote PA are gathered in 3 categories:

Methods

Study sample: 185 physiotherapists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean ± SD or %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>40 ± 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority (years)</td>
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<td>16 ± 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>44.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
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<td>37.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing home</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- 25 open-ended, multiple choice or Likert scale questions
- Reliability : 84% inter-analyst 90% intra-analyst
- Data processing by Statistica®

Discussion and further work

- PA determinants identified by physiotherapists were similar to the findings proposed by the “Eurobarometer study” (Sjöström, 2006). Their intervention must be adapted to these motivational variables in order to mobilize appropriate promoting strategies at each level of action (OMS, 2006).

- Physiotherapists are aware of their crucial role in PA promotion. Nevertheless, this responsibility is implicit and so far little used and implemented in the field. The establishment of specific trainings, dealing with physical activity promotion aiming at informing physiotherapists, might be an interesting step which should be easily organized.

- Actions undertaken by physiotherapists are mostly isolated without connections with other actors of PA promotion. As mentioned by Verhagen & Engbers (2008), to date, their role has been minimal in multidisciplinary approaches. This dialogue should be emphasized in order to respect the principles of an ecological approach.

- Most of the promoting actions of the physiotherapists are “curative”. Prevention and detection of sedentary behaviours, considered as resources to avoid further disease outbreaks, should therefore be increased, particularly through practice of physical activity incentives.