

Defining skills and attributes for safe, effective on-call physiotherapy practice: a modified Delphi study

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Introduction

Clinical competence relates not only to operational skills, but also to non-operational attributes such as communication and decision making. The relative importance of different non-operational attributes is likely to vary between physiotherapy specialties depending on the nature and context of patient problems. Within respiratory care, on-call physiotherapy is often delivered by both respiratory and non-respiratory physiotherapy staff. Consensus as to skills and attributes required for safe, effective on-call practice would help guide future training strategies.

Aim

To identify those attributes, clinical reasoning methods and non-operational skills deemed important for safe, effective on-call physiotherapy by a panel of cardiorespiratory experts and postgraduate physiotherapy students.

Methods

Nine expert physiotherapists were asked, 'what makes a safe and effective on-call respiratory physiotherapist?' A comprehensive list of statements was compiled, grouped into themes and summarised. The expert panel and 27 postgraduate cardiorespiratory students ranked their top 5 most important factors and were invited to add additional items. The accumulative ranked list was returned to the participants for further ranking until consensus was reached.

Results

'Ability to balance benefits versus risks of treatment' was ranked the highest by 100% of experts and 80% of postgraduate students. 'Knowledge of his/her limitations' and 'ability to clinically reason a broad range of scenarios' were ranked second and third respectively.

Conclusion

On-call training programmes should explore and address clinical reasoning skills, particularly with regard to the complexities of balancing perceived risks and benefits of treatments and the limits of ability or scope of competent practice in individual on-call staff.