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Fostering Person-Centred Care in Physiotherapy Rehabilitation Practice

Abstract: The Person-Centred Rehabilitation (PCR) Model emphasises empathy and practical communication skills among healthcare professionals, and the World Confederation for Physical Therapy recognises PCR as essential for establishing therapeutic alliances within professional standards. However, implementing in PCR in physiotherapy practice faces specific challenges, particularly in developing these competencies among healthcare students, which creates a significant gap between the recognised importance and practical application. This presentation explores the integration of PCR in physiotherapy rehabilitation practice, using data from a longitudinal study. A total of 183 undergraduate students of rehabilitation health programs including person-oriented (PO) professions (e.g., Physiotherapy) or technique-oriented (TO) professions (e.g., Medical imaging and radiotherapy) completed both the Patient-Practitioner Orientation Scale (PPOS) and the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE) during their first and third academic years. Compared with the TO group, the third-year PO group (physiotherapy students) demonstrated significantly higher patient-centred attitudes and greater self-perceived communication skills. The pairwise comparison revealed significant differences between the first and third academic years, with PO showing a significant increase in empathy—an effect not observed in the TO group. These findings demonstrate that educational exposure and professional orientation have a significant influence on empathy and communication skill development, thereby addressing the implementation of some of challenges identified in the PCR Model. By affirming PCR as a care model with tangible applications, these results contribute to shaping strategies that foster more effective and personalized person-centred care across rehabilitation contexts, especially in physiotherapy.

Keywords: Person-Centred Rehabilitation; Empathy; Physiotherapy; Students; Rehabilitatin

Biography: Margarida Custódio dos Santos is a psychologist. She is 65 years old, the mother of three women, and the grandmother of two adorable children. She has worked in the healthcare field for 42 years and has been teaching in higher education for 40 years — 27 of which have been dedicated to training physiotherapists. She believes she has learned, and continues to learn, a great deal from her students. She experiences the reality of physiotherapy closely, as she has muscular dystrophy. Her area of practice and research focuses on chronic illness, particularly in pediatrics.