

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Education – Past, Present and Future

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Physical and rehabilitation medicine (PRM) is an important specialty in modern health care system, especially in the developed countries. The focus of the specialty revolves around achievement of maximum functional potential of patients with impairments and disabilities. It improves the quality of life of the patients as well as the care givers by decreasing their burden. Professionals working in physical medicine and rehabilitation deal the patients with disability to reduce the impact of their disease or disability on their daily life, to prevent avoidable complications and to minimize the effects of changing disability.¹ PRM is an excellent example of inter disciplinary and multi disciplinary team approach towards total patient care that goes beyond the hospital settings and helps them to re integrate back in the society. The specialty works as a collaborative team at tertiary care rehabilitation settings where physiatrists act as team leaders and managers to achieve specific goals. The PRM team include rehabilitation medicine physician, physical therapist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, psychologist, prosthetist and orthotist, Rehab nurses, Rehab engineers and social workers.

Rehabilitation medicine physicians, also called Physiatrists are medical doctors having post graduate qualification and specialty training in PMR. In Pakistan the highest qualification in PMR is fellowship of college of physicians and surgeons of Pakistan (FCPS). They specialize in disability management by diagnosing and treating medical conditions, physical assessment of the impairments and disabilities, setting of rehabilitation goals, and

carrying out team meetings to get input from all members specialized in their respective fields to improve patients functional status and subsequent follow ups for achievement of goals. The numbers of Physiatrists is very small, only 50 for a population of 180 million. Majority of them are serving in the Armed forces. The Armed force institute of rehabilitation medicine (AFIRM) is a state of the art tertiary care rehabilitation institute with complete multidisciplinary rehabilitation services in the country.² The Master of sciences in pain medicine is offered by some universities is popular among rehab physicians as it helps in better management of pain both acute and chronic in patients with disabilities.³ Recently second fellowship in Pain medicine has been started by CPSP and is another avenue for rehab physicians. Super specializations in fields like sports medicine, Rheumatological rehab, Neuro rehab, Cardiac rehab, Musculoskeletal rehab and Electrodiagnostics are required for the future growth of the specialty. Physical Therapy is another major profession involved in physical rehabilitation. The role of physical therapists is to asses and diagnose physical impairments and disabilities and manage with exercise, mobilization, manipulation and therapeutic modalities.⁴ They work as autonomous professionals with direct access to the patients but in rehabilitation institutes they work as active team members in collaboration with other team members. Unlike rehab physicians they are in handsome numbers throughout the country working in clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, special education centers, universities sports and fitness centers. The first physical therapy school was started in 1956 at Jinnah postgraduate medical entre Karachi with 2 years diploma course in physical therapy. The course was upgraded to 3 year B.Sc in 1961, 4 years BS in 2000, and 5 years doctor of physical therapy in 2008. Recently there has been an exponential increase in physical therapy institutes in the country and around 74 institutes are offering different physiotherapy programs in Pakistan including doctor of physical therapy, Masters of science in orthopedic manual physical therapy, neuromuscular physical therapy, cardio pulmonary physical therapy, and sports physical therapy. Recently some universities

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have started PhD programs in physical therapy and PhD in rehabilitation sciences. There is need for MS level and PhD specialized programs in community-based rehabilitation, cardiac rehabilitation and Neuro rehabilitation to promote rehabilitation research and development among physiotherapist in the country. The current mushrooming of physical therapy institutes shows the robust growth of the field but at the same time the question on quality of education offered, clinical skills and exposure and the expertise of the final products has to be ensured for its survival. Speech and language pathology (SLP) or Speech Therapy is also a key area of physical medicine and rehabilitation. They specializes in the evaluation and management of communication and swallowing disorders.⁵ Their number is scarce and currently only few universities are offering PGD and MS level degree program in speech language pathology. Entry level bachelor as well as specialized programs in this area are needed to improve the quality and number of these professionals. Occupational therapy is the use of assessment and treatment to develop, recover, or maintain the training in activities of daily living and work skills of people with a physical, mental, or cognitive disabilities. Presently BS programs are offered by some universities but Masters Level qualification is needed in this area.⁶ The Prosthetist and orthotist are professionals specializing in assessment, production, fitting, and training of artificial limbs and supports. Currently five institutes are offering BS level programs and doing a great job but MS and PhD level programs are required in future. The field of physical medicine and rehabilitation is emerging in

Pakistan, We need to exploit the need for the field and build it on solid educational and evidence based practices. We need to ensure the quality controls in its education to avoid quacks to fill in the gaps. The future lies in improving curriculum by incorporating best practices, state of the art and regulated teaching institutes, good clinical exposure and post graduate educational opportunities along with tertiary care rehabilitation facilities for ideal patient care, training and research. Emphasis should be on strengthening team work with all the professionals involved for the single goal of patients functionality. Since, "The chain is as strong as its weakest link" so we need to identify the weaknesses in the team and improve them as a team because in rehabilitation "We rise and fall together"

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