

# **Hartley, S., Yeowell, G. Future proofing the Physiotherapy Profession.**

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**Title:** Future proofing the Physiotherapy Profession

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**Background**

The augmentation of chronic conditions due to an ageing society, the lack of physical activity and the pursuit of unhealthy lifestyles, poses a major challenge to global health care systems<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the costs of health care have escalated with the prediction that in the UK alone, the additional annual expenditure, due to co-morbidities, will reach £5 billion by 2018<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, innovative ways to provide cost effective services are needed<sup>5</sup>. As modifiable risk factors account for over half the disease burden of later life, interventions targeted at the population level by promoting health and wellbeing of citizens, could make a significant contribution to the prevention of chronic diseases and their progression<sup>7</sup>. The physiotherapy profession is ideally placed to take on these new initiatives and lead the way in revolutionising the management of chronic conditions<sup>6</sup>. However, to rise to this challenge needs the collective support of physiotherapists for radical change in practice, including the capacity to take on the role of public health promoters<sup>6</sup>.

**Purpose**

To explore the role of the physiotherapist as viewed by physiotherapy academics and undergraduate physiotherapy students. The intention is to gain an insight into the future scope of the physiotherapy profession.

**Methods**

The study had an exploratory qualitative design, which was undertaken from an interpretive paradigm. A purposive sample was used to recruit participants to two focus groups. One focus group was with academic staff, the second was with 3rd year BSc (Hons) undergraduate physiotherapy students. All participants were recruited from a university in England in 2016. Both focus groups were carried out by the same researcher (SH). Each focus group interview lasted 50-70 minutes and were digitally recorded. An interview schedule was used to guide the interviews. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results**

Six participants were recruited to the academic focus group; four were female. Their experience of working in academia ranged from 2 to 23 years. Seven students were recruited to the second focus group; five were female. Three themes were identified and were common to both groups: 'philosophy of practice', 'changing role', 'tension between cultures'.

**Conclusion**

'Philosophy of practice': The underpinning philosophy of practice was identified which included transferrable skills, wellbeing, and holistic care.

'Changing role': A changing role of the physiotherapist was identified. This included a need to incorporate health economics in healthcare provision; and an extended role with a public health focus. Participants perceived the role was being shaped by changes in the Health Service, which was shaped being shaped by the UK government's ideology.

'Tension between cultures' were highlighted by both groups. This included: university and clinical practice; the market-place and practice; and current practice and the vision for the future.

### **Implications**

The physiotherapy profession is ideally placed to lead the way in revolutionising the management of chronic conditions. By understanding how the profession sees itself can ensure the profession is fit for the future. From this the profession can create a vision for the future that may involve a radical change in practice, including the capacity to take on the role of public health promoters.

### **Keywords**

chronic conditions, health promotion, service provision.

### **Funding**

None

### **Ethic approval**

Ethical approval was obtained from Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty Academic Ethics Committee: Reference 1385