



Knowledge, Perception and Media Reporting of Physiotherapy and Physiotherapy-related Issues among Healthcare Journalists in Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

The physiotherapy profession is rapidly growing and there is need to adopt strategies to improve its involvement and relationship with the public. The profession must, as a matter of urgency reach out, market itself and promote the health of members of the public. Unfortunately, the importance and role of physiotherapy have been inadequately communicated to the public, especially with regards to the media reporting of physiotherapy and related issues. This study investigated the knowledge, perception, and media reporting of physiotherapy and issues related to it among healthcare journalists in Lagos, Nigeria. Fifty-three healthcare journalists registered with the Health Writers Association of Nigeria were conveniently selected in a cross-sectional survey. A self-administered questionnaire containing 31 questions was used with data being summarised and analysed descriptively. With a return rate of over 90%, 47 (94%) respondents agreed that physiotherapy was a professional course, 1 (2%) respondent did not agree with this while 2 (4%) did not know about the nature of the profession. On physiotherapy being very important in healthcare delivery, 38 (76%) respondents strongly agreed, 10 (20%) agreed and 2 (4%) had no idea. Four respondents equated physiotherapy to physical education and 90% (n = 45) perceived it as massage. While 40% (n = 20) had previously reported on physiotherapy, only 4% (n = 2) had frequently interacted with physiotherapists. In conclusion, the study respondents had good knowledge and positive perception of physiotherapy, but poor media reporting for physiotherapy and physiotherapy-related issues. Constant interaction with physiotherapists and physiotherapy enlightenment programmes should be used to strengthen knowledge and perception of physiotherapy among healthcare journalists.

Keywords: Knowledge; Perception; Media reporting of Physiotherapy; Physiotherapy-related issues; Healthcare Journalists

Introduction

Physiotherapy provides healthcare services to people to develop, maintain and restore maximum movement and functional ability throughout their lifespan (World

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Confederation for Physical Therapy [WCPT], 2017). It is an inevitable aspect of healthcare and its rapid growth calls for a need to adopt strategies to improve the involvement and relationship of its practitioners with the public (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy [CSP], 2013). The scope of physiotherapy practice is not limited to direct patient or client care but also includes public health education, health promotion strategies, patient advocacy, development and implementation of health policies (CSP, 2013; WCPT, 2017). The physiotherapy profession is one of the oldest and most prestigious components of allied health professions (University of Sydney, 2002). Physiotherapists are professionals who utilise diagnostic and assessment procedures, as well as tools in order to develop and implement preventive and therapeutic interventions (Canadian Physiotherapy Association, 2012). Due to the largeness of the body of knowledge of physiotherapy, some physiotherapists specialise in specific clinical areas including Cardiopulmonary, Neurology, Ergonomics, Orthopaedics, Sports, Women's health and Paediatric Physiotherapy among others.

Journalism is the activity of journalists in the preparation of written, visual or audio materials intended for dissemination through public media with reference to factual, ongoing events of public concern (Cyril, 2014). It is intended to inform the society about itself and make events public that would otherwise remain private (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010; Safari, Baratloo & Yousefifard, 2015). Journalism has a role in disseminating research findings and communicates key messages to change particular health policies as well as advocate for correct health behaviours (Hiscckman, 2014; Keshvari, Yamani, Adibi & Shahnaze, 2018). Healthcare journalism serves not only as a tool for dissemination of health information but as a medium for bridging the gap between healthcare professionals and the public (Keshvari *et al.*, 2018). In spite of this *intermediary* role, the importance and role of physiotherapy have been inadequately communicated to the public (Webster, Holdsworth, McFadyen & Little, 2008) especially with regards to the media reporting of physiotherapy and issues related to it. The media has been found to be a major tool in improving public health education and disseminating information on health promotion strategies (Safari *et al.*, 2015). The literature is sparse on knowledge and perception of physiotherapy among healthcare journalists. Similarly, very few studies have reported the physiotherapy-related health promotion available among healthcare reporters (Boakye, Quartey, Baidoo & Ahenkorah, 2018). Therefore, the availability and extent of physiotherapy-related health reporting among healthcare journalists is worth investigating. This situation may even be more challenging in less-developed countries, such as Nigeria, where the population of physiotherapists and that of healthcare journalists remain well below expected percentage of the entire population (Mbada, Olawuyi & Fatoye, 2019). Expectedly, this would lead to an undesirable gap in the overall public knowledge and perception about physiotherapy as a health care profession. Hence, this study investigated the knowledge, perception, and media reporting of physiotherapy and physiotherapy-related issues among healthcare journalists in Lagos, Nigeria.

Methods

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive survey involving 50 members of the Health Writers Association of Nigeria (HEWAN), consisting of television, radio, print and online healthcare journalists. Included in the study were reporters with at least one year's experience as healthcare journalists. Editors and sub-editors were excluded as their main task excludes field reporting. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Health Research and Ethics Committee of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital while informed consent was obtained from the respondents. Fifty-three (53) journalists were conveniently recruited at the monthly meeting of HEWAN, Lagos State Chapter. They were made to complete a self-administered questionnaire and return it at the end of the meeting. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Odebiyi, Omotunde, Aiyejusunle, & Olalekan (2008) and subjected to content validity by a 7-man focus group of experienced physiotherapists who are experts in research and clinical physiotherapy. Corrected copies of the questionnaires were subjected to face validity through 7 journalists (HEWAN members) before the monthly meeting. The questionnaire contained 31 questions divided into four sections. Section I collected information on personal characteristics such as gender, age, highest educational level, and years of practice; section II sought healthcare journalists' general knowledge about physiotherapy; section III sought journalists' perception of physiotherapy, and section IV sought information on physiotherapy-related health reporting by healthcare journalists. Questions in sections I, II, and III were categorised into YES or NO, while the Likert scale of 1-5 was used for section IV, with 1 indicating strongly disagree, and 5 indicating strongly agree. Data were summarised using descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages.

Results

A total of fifty (50) copies of the questionnaire were returned yielding a response rate of 94%. Two-thirds of the respondents were females and the mean age was 37.08 years (Table 1). A few of the respondents had HND, while majority had BSc as their highest educational level (Table 1). Also, majority of the respondents had between 1 and 5 years of work experience, while a few of them had more than 20 years' work experience. Two-fifths of the respondents had utilised the services of a physiotherapist for treatment/consultation, while others had not (Table 2). Very few of the respondents were not familiar with physiotherapy (Table 2). Almost all respondents agreed that physiotherapy is a professional course; one respondent did not agree with this, while very few did not know whether physiotherapy is a professional course or not (Table 2). Most respondents said physiotherapy was relevant in orthopaedics; about one-third believed physiotherapy was relevant in neurology while few of them stated that it was relevant in oncology (Table 2).

Most of the respondents said there was need for more information about physiotherapy. A few of them were satisfied with their level of awareness about physiotherapy. Almost two-thirds of them had neither written nor reported an article on physiotherapy-related topics, while more than one-third had done so (Table 3). However, more than half of the respondents said they had been part of a team interview related to physiotherapy (Table

3). Very few of the respondents frequently interacted with physiotherapists in the course of their work, about two-third occasionally did so, while about a third of the respondents had no interaction at all (Table 3).

Almost all respondents agreed that physiotherapy offer massage while a few of them stated that physiotherapists offer surgery as part of their treatments (Table 4). Exercise therapy and postural corrections are also among the treatments perceived by the majority of the respondents to be given by physiotherapists. Almost all of them perceived that it requires a degree to be a physiotherapist (Table 4). Also, more than two-thirds of the respondents perceived that it takes 4-5 years of training to become a physiotherapist with almost all of them perceiving physiotherapists as professionals that work in hospitals, sports club, and clinics (Table 4). More than half of the respondents perceived that physiotherapists work in private settings and nursing homes. Almost all respondents perceived that they had adequate knowledge about physiotherapy, while very few held no such perception (Table 4). Whereas two-thirds of the respondents stated that they had positive perception of physiotherapy, a third of them had negative perception of the profession (Table 4).

Most of the respondents strongly agreed that physiotherapy is very important in healthcare delivery, a few of them agreed with this, while very few did not know whether or not physiotherapy is very important in healthcare delivery (Table 5). In addition, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that physiotherapy has an important role in teaching public health, while about a third of them agreed; very few disagreed ($n = 6$), were not sure ($n = 2$), and did not know about the importance of physiotherapy in public health education ($n = 8$) (Table 5).

Table 1: *Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	20	40
Female	30	60
Age (years)		
21-30	15	30
31-40	20	40
41-50	12	24
51-60	2	4
61-70	1	2
Education		
Higher National Diploma	5	10
Bachelor of Science	27	54
Master of Science	8	16
Master of Business Administration	2	4
Postgraduate Diploma	3	6
Others	5	10

Table 2: Knowledge of physiotherapy among the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Utilisation of physiotherapy services		
Yes	20	40
No	30	60
Choice of physiotherapist consulted if 'yes'		
Personal communication	9	45
Convenient location	1	5
Health magazine	3	15
Doctor's referral	6	30
Sports event/club	1	5
Reason if 'No'		
Not had a problem that require physiotherapy	27	90
Physiotherapists are not easily accessible	2	6.7
Prefer going to the Doctor only	1	3.3
Familiar with physiotherapy as a profession		
Yes	47	94
No	3	6
Aware of what is done by physiotherapist		
Yes	49	98
No	1	2
Source(s) of knowledge if 'yes'		
Literature (books and journals)	12	24.5
Media	31	63.3
Internet	21	42.9
Family/friends	12	24.5
Consultation with a physiotherapist	11	22.4
Clinical experience through doctor/health expert	13	26.5
Not Sure	1	2
Others	2	4.1
Physiotherapy is a professional course		
Yes	47	94
No	1	2
Physiotherapy is the same as physical education		
Yes	4	8
No	34	68
Not sure	12	24
Knowledge as a specialty		
Paediatrics	26	52
Orthopaedics	40	80
Oncology	8	16
Neurology	18	36
Urology	7	14
Geriatrics	14	28
Sports	38	76
Women's health	22	44
Cardiopulmonary	15	30
Ergonomics	10	20
Occupational health	29	58

Table 3: Respondents' knowledge of physiotherapy and physiotherapy-related

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Part of a team interview for physiotherapy		
Yes	27	54
No	23	46
Featured article/report on physiotherapy		
Yes	20	40
No	30	60
Interaction with physiotherapists		
Frequently	2	4
Occasionally	32	64
Not at all	16	32
Satisfaction with level of awareness/knowledge		
Yes	6	12
No	36	72
Cannot say	8	16
Need for more information on physiotherapy		
Yes	44	88
No	1	2
Cannot say	5	10
Opinions on ways for improvement of awareness		
Yes	44	88
Cannot say	6	12
How best health reporters get information		
Constant interaction	35	79.5
Invitation to physiotherapy conferences/seminars	34	77.3
Routines press release/conferences	27	61.4
Special physiotherapy awareness programme	30	68.3

Table 4: Respondents, perception of physiotherapy

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification required of a physiotherapist		
Certificate	3	6
Diploma	1	2
Degree	46	92
Years of training of a physiotherapist		
3 years	5	10
4 years	17	34
5 years	19	38
6 years	9	18
Work setting(s) of a physiotherapist		
Hospitals	47	94
Offices	11	22
Nursing homes	33	66
Disable centres	33	66
Rehabilitation centres	33	66
Sport clubs/clinics	46	92
Private practice	34	68
Factories	17	34
Operation theatres	23	46
Armed forces	16	32
None of the above	1	2
Others	1	2
Treatments/services of a physiotherapist		
Hydrotherapy	16	32
Massage/Relaxation	45	90
Tendon grafting	21	42
Electro-medical therapy	15	30
Exercise therapy	35	70
Cold packs	19	38
Splinting	17	34
Oral/parenteral drug administration	5	10
Bandaging and Taping	29	58
Topical drug administration	9	18
Health promotion/education	27	54
Surgery	9	18
Suctioning	9	18
Acupuncture	23	46
Radiotherapy	11	22
Postural correction	30	60
Manipulation/Traction	19	38
Knowledge of physiotherapy as a profession		
Adequate	46	92
Inadequate	4	8
Perception of physiotherapy as a profession		
Positive	33	66
Negative	17	34

Table 5: Respondents' perception of physiotherapy as a profession

Variables	Responses (in %)						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Importance of physiotherapy in healthcare delivery	76	20	0	0	0	4	100
Professionalism and competence of physiotherapists	42	36	14	0	0	16	100
Importance of physiotherapy in public health education	54	30	2	6	0	8	100
Involvement of physiotherapists in research	34	34	18	2	12	10	100
Availability of physiotherapists	10	22	18	26	6	18	100
Physiotherapists are caring to patients	2	42	16	2	0	20	100
Adequate training schools for physiotherapy in Nigeria	6	8	30	26	10	20	100
Effective treatments by physiotherapists	22	40	12	0	0	26	100
Capable diagnosis by physiotherapists	14	32	14	8	4	28	100
Quacks claim to be trained physiotherapists	34	20	20	4	4	18	100

Discussion

This study investigated the knowledge, perception, and media reporting of physiotherapy and physiotherapy-related issues among healthcare journalists in Lagos, Nigeria. The mean age of the respondents in this study is comparable to that reported by

Appiah, Gastel, Burdine and Russell (2015) among Ghanaian Journalists Association. However, more than half of the respondents of the present study were females in contrast to the higher percentage of males obtained by Appiah *et al.* (2015). Females are reported to be more predominant than males among journalists in the Western world (Bauer, Howard, Ramos, Massarani & Amorim, 2013). The majority of the respondents in the current study were degree holders. This is in consonant with the report of Bauer *et al.* (2013). Our finding that healthcare journalists have adequate knowledge of physiotherapy with the knowledge acquired by majority of them being from the media corroborates the report of Bauer *et al.* (2013) that most journalists glean their knowledge from newsletters and the internet. However, our result is in contrast to the report of Appiah *et al.* (2015) which revealed that journalists rely on the qualification and affiliation of health professionals as a source of knowledge about them.

Given the report that there are relatively few physiotherapists in Nigeria from a handful of universities, it is quite impressive that the majority of the healthcare journalists in our study had a good understanding of physiotherapy as a professional course, and not equating it to physical education (Akodu, Akinfeleye & Nwajuegboe, 2018). Also, health journalists in this study expressed their highest knowledge of physiotherapy specialty in the following order: orthopaedics, sports, occupational, and paediatrics. This is not unexpected because of the anecdotal report of physiotherapists being referred to as “bone doctors” by their clients, and the role portrayed by physiotherapist during sporting events. This finding is also supported by the perception expressed by more than half of the health journalists in this study that physiotherapy treatments entails massage, postural correction, exercise therapy, bandaging and taping, as well as health promotion and education. Although, health journalists were confident that they had adequate knowledge of physiotherapy, their perception of physiotherapy treatments involving suctioning, surgery, topical drug administration, and tendon grafting was wrong. This was, possibly, supported by their desire for more information about physiotherapy and their level of satisfaction about their awareness of physiotherapy.

Our study also showed that less than half of the healthcare journalists had featured an article on physiotherapy-related topic while a third of them had not. This finding agrees with that of Balogun (1998) who observed that the greatest challenge facing physiotherapists in Nigeria is educating the masses on the role of physiotherapy in healthcare delivery. The finding that few healthcare journalists frequently interact with physiotherapists agrees with the report by Snow, Shamus and Hill (2001) which revealed that the public poorly has direct access to physiotherapists. However, in this study majority of the respondents were interested in learning more about the physiotherapy profession in order to help them report effectively on physiotherapy-related topics. Quackery and lack of enlightenment on physiotherapy might be the obstacles preventing journalists from delivering physiotherapy-health related information effectively. They further suggested ways by which they can gain more information about physiotherapy. Many of them recommended constant interaction of

physiotherapists with health reporters and invitation of health reporters to physiotherapy conferences and seminars.

Majority of the healthcare journalists in our study perceived that they had a positive perception of physiotherapy which may be true given that majority of them asserted the importance of physiotherapy in healthcare delivery, professionalism and competency of physiotherapists as well as involvement of physiotherapists in research, and effectiveness of physiotherapy treatments. This finding is not surprising as few of the respondents said they got information about physiotherapy from consultation with physiotherapists and a good number of them indicated interaction with physiotherapists occasionally. This highlights the need to enhance physiotherapy health promotion by physiotherapists in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Healthcare journalists in Lagos, Nigeria have good knowledge and a positive perception of physiotherapy and they occasionally inform the public about physiotherapy. There is need to further educate healthcare journalists about physiotherapy through more interactions such as routine press briefing and press releases, press conferences, special physiotherapy awareness programmes and invitation to cover physiotherapy-related programmes, seminars, workshops and conferences. Further studies to evaluate and assess the knowledge feedback and perception of physiotherapy among other relevant sectors of the public about physiotherapy may be desirable.

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