

Movement for Health

8th September, World Physical Therapy Day



The importance of physiotherapy as an adjunct to well-being finds its origins amongst the ancient Greeks who understood that the capacity to move is a vital element of health. This philosophy, today still plays a fundamental role in ability recognition and in the promotion of optimal physical activity within the limits imposed by conditions or diseases that limit ability. As such, physiotherapy has grown to become an essential part of health service delivery systems around the world.

The contributions of physiotherapy and its importance has grown exponentially in the recent past because people are living longer and also because people are leading busier lives than ever before, with diseases and wear-and-tear conditions taking an increased toll on people's bodies.

Around the world, each year, physiotherapists help millions of people to manage the effects of aging, illness, accidents and the stresses and strains of life.

The unique nature of physiotherapy as a profession is that it is a holistic profession that specialises in Human Movement. Each year in September, the World Confederation for Physiotherapy dedicates its time and resources to promoting the profession amongst the public and to stimulate awareness of the contributions of physiotherapy and the problems associated with poor health, seeking a solution through positive campaigns on how to address such situations.

This year the theme of the campaign is 'Movement for Health'. Physiotherapists identify physical impairments, limitations and disabilities that prevent people from being as independent as they can be. They analyse the source of the problems, determining ways of overcoming this, and maximising the individual's movement ability and potential. Physiotherapists do not stop at the provision of treatment. Rather they promote people's health, fitness and wellness. Essentially it means that they prevent illness.

The contribution of physiotherapy towards health and well-being is increasing with studies indicating how efficient physiotherapy is at treating and preventing back pain, balance disorders, and strength decline; how physiotherapists can provide exercise programmes for conditions like coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and hypertension which are often caused by unhealthy lifestyles; how physiotherapy can help people affected by disease, injury or amputation to live better and more independent lives.

With this in mind, this year the Malta Association of Physiotherapists is joining this global campaign. We have two main objectives: the first is to promote the scope of physiotherapy and raise the awareness of its contribution, and the second is to communicate the message for ill-health prevention and well-being promotion.

For this occasion we have produced a short visual aid that shall be displayed to the general public through various activities that shall be taking place around physiotherapy departments, media and hospital bed side displays.

This year's message for health concern is focused on obesity.

Worldwide, there is a concern for the ever-increasing epidemic of obesity which is probably one of the greatest challenges to health care systems around the world in the 21st century. One just needs to look at the numbers of people affected by obesity to understand its impact:

*350 million people globally are obese;
1.6 million adults and 20 million children under the age of 5 are overweight.*

This may be linked to further knowledge that:

*At any one time 5% of a country's population are affected by low back pain,
180 million people worldwide have diabetes
Cardiovascular diseases like heart attacks and stroke account for 29% of the world's deaths, and these are on the increase in the developed countries.*

The situation in Malta is alarming. In a 2005 survey of schoolchildren aged 7 – 11 years Malta topped the list of EU countries for obesity and overweight. Amongst adults, the overweight rates surpass that of the USA with >28% of men and >34% of women being overweight.

Physiotherapists, as exercise experts, should join the worldwide concern for the growing epidemic of obesity.

There are two important intervention strategies to prevent and manage obesity. The first is optimal nutrition. The other is increased exercise and physical activity. The potential contribution of physiotherapy to the latter is immense.

WCPT recognises that physical activity is any movement of the body that requires the use of our skeletal muscles, which in turn require energy expenditure. This energy expenditure is basic to weight control.

The sooner our nation begins to adopt initiatives and programs to combat obesity and other related diseases of civilisation, the less will be the burden on health systems delivery around the world. So, physiotherapy does not just mean more healthy people but more productive people who can contribute to the countries' economy.

Our advice through this campaign is simple. Keep active.

Children and young persons under the age of 18 need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day.

Adults need 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 days a week or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity 3 days a week, in order to maintain health. It is recommended that on two occasions they perform some form of muscle strengthening exercises.

Walking is a healthy weight-bearing exercise that provides a total body work-out. A recommended magic-number is 10,000 steps a day to achieve a healthy active lifestyle. This is achieved by walking at a brisk pace for 30 to 60 minutes.

How active are you? Well, that depends on your lifestyle index: Sedentary persons usually walk less than 5000 steps each day and low-active persons might reach 7,500 steps in a day.

Our message is to aim for 10,000 steps each day. If your current levels of activity fall below the recommended levels, aim to reach it over a 6-week period adding 500 steps every 2 weeks.

Other cardiovascular activities are just as relevant, with cycling at 5mph being equivalent to 50 steps/min; cycling at 15mph being equivalent to 150 steps/min and swimming a slow steady pace equivalent to 100 steps/min.

This 'Movement for Health' campaign is an opportunity for physiotherapists to say what we do, why we do it, how we do it and why physiotherapists are movement, physical activity and exercise experts. The Malta Association of Physiotherapists urges its members to promote this message and spend some time to explain to the people they know and meet about the importance of physical activity and the ill-effects of obesity.

Physiotherapy makes a difference!