

# Physical Therapy towards both Athletes and Casual Players

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## Abstract

Employers of sports physiotherapists, including sports organisations and committees, health centres and the leisure industry, will benefit by gaining a better understanding of the role and capabilities, enabling quality assurance mechanisms to be developed and implemented.

**Keywords:** Pain status; Campaigns; Equipment; Heterogeneity; Lesions; Interventions

## Introduction

The general public will benefit by raising awareness of the expertise associated with this role. Sports physiotherapists will benefit by having their knowledge and skill levels recognised, providing a platform for further professional development. It is important that a variety of coherent career development pathways are made accessible to professionals who aim to develop into sports physiotherapists, or demonstrate their current level of competence. Learning routes may be formal, in academic establishments, in clinical skill based courses or informal, for example, through the development of a professional portfolio. Descriptions of professional behaviours can allow sports physiotherapists to demonstrate and gain credit for current and prior learning. As sports physiotherapists seek more formal opportunities to fulfil their identified learning needs, it is important that educators are aware of requirements [1]. Descriptions of professional behaviours allow the design of learning opportunities with appropriate content, designed to enable the professional to reach the level of performance required. Professional behaviours must be described alongside an indication of the minimum level of performance. There was consensus from the Core Group and a panel of experts that sports physiotherapists should aspire to work at Master's level. Specific competencies and standards should build on the generic competencies of a physiotherapist developed through an undergraduate physiotherapy degree programme [2]. These competencies and standards are described in the European Physiotherapy Benchmark Statement. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework were selected to describe Master's level. While master's level is viewed as the threshold level for specialisation in sports physiotherapy it is recognised that some professionals will progress to PhD and clinical and professional doctorate levels. The next stage of competency development involved the collection of international documentation relating to sports physiotherapy practice and education. Content analysis of documents from sixteen countries was undertaken, to explore international differences and similarities. An appointed panel of expert sports physiotherapists cross-checked the emergent themes to ensure that they were comprehensive. The panel of experts, facilitated by project leaders and the researcher, devised a definition and description of the sports physiotherapist that aimed to explain the distinctive nature of the specialist. The same group went on to establish competency areas through a qualitative process of allocating themes to roles within the selected framework, and by grouping similar themes within these roles. For example, themes that described the sports physiotherapist's input to rehabilitation were grouped within the central role: manager of the patient / client. When consensus was reached, competencies were written by the researcher [3].

The competency statements underwent a rigorous review and

revision process, involving all project participants, and a public consultation. The working document was presented to the International Federation of Sports Physiotherapy prior to its General Meeting in November 2004, when delegates voted unanimously for its adoption. A sports physiotherapist is a recognised professional who demonstrates advanced competencies in the promotion of safe physical activity participation, provision of advice, and adaptation of rehabilitation and training interventions, for the purposes of preventing injury, restoring optimal function, and contributing to the enhancement of sports performance, in athletes of all ages and abilities, while ensuring a high standard of professional and ethical practice. Sports physiotherapists are professionals who aspire to work at master's level. Sports physiotherapists work with athletes of all ages and abilities, at individual and group levels, to prevent injury, restore optimal function and contribute to the enhancement of sports performance, using sports-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes to achieve best clinical practice [4]. Sports physiotherapists are pioneers in their field, critically challenging and evaluating practice, developing new knowledge through research, and disseminating this understanding to initiate changes in practice. In their role as a professional leader, sports physiotherapists influence their professional and multidisciplinary cultures by keeping up to date with new innovations, incorporating them into education, and creating a professional environment that enables the implementation of best practice. They aim to promote safe participation in physical activity, and the sports physiotherapy profession, to the wider community and facilitate international mobility of therapists through education and practice [5].

## Discussion

Sports Physiotherapists incorporate knowledge and understanding of innovations into the roles they play as advisors at several levels as case managers, in service delivery, and in their influences on policy change. At the heart of sports physiotherapists' thinking and behaviour lies understanding of and sensitivity towards the implications of injury for the athlete and the impact on others around them. They maintain independence in their decision-making, ensuring their duty of care

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to the athlete in a context of many potential conflicts of interest. The rigorous process of competency development led to a final list of eleven competencies [6]. It is important to note that competencies refer to athletes of all levels and abilities, including those who participate in competitive and recreational sports, exercise and moderate physical activity. The competencies are the first step towards a common platform for professional recognition. They have been developed with input from experts across the globe and they have been accepted by an international audience. Competencies provide the foundation for the development of standards, which describe specific behaviours that indicate the minimum threshold level of achievement of the competencies. The standards are currently being developed by the SPA project team. An audit toolkit is also being developed to enable the evaluation of competencies and standards for both formal and non-formal learning. The use of a reflective professional portfolio is being promoted to facilitate the recording of non-formal learning. Together, the competencies, standards and audit toolkit can be used to promote professional recognition across Europe and the wider world, as a guide for educational design and quality assurance mechanisms, and as a career development tool for individual sports physiotherapists [7]. The audit toolkit will be tested in different countries to ensure that it serves this intended purpose. The SPA website provides information of interest to the public and members of the sporting and physiotherapy communities. Together with literature resources being developed for the site, and on line learning opportunities through an educational portal, these will interact to facilitate the sports physiotherapist's development and demonstration of professional competencies and standards. The physiotherapy profession has developed rapidly over the years, incorporating a progressively greater depth and breadth of knowledge and skills. This has been facilitated by the development of post-qualification training and postgraduate education in a variety of clinical areas. As physiotherapists have developed higher levels of knowledge and skills in specific areas, this has led to specialisation within the profession. There is wide recognition of sports physiotherapy as a specialisation, with many national organisations collaborating to form the International Federation of Sports Physiotherapy in 2000 [8]. As well as working with people with injuries sustained during physical and sporting activities sports physiotherapists work with athletes who compete in an international context, requiring the ability to practice in different countries. As a nationally regulated profession, professional mobility requires clarity regarding the capabilities and scope of sports physiotherapists. In recent years, there has been a growing political drive to increase professional mobility throughout the EU, consolidated in the Bologna declaration. For this to be possible in nationally regulated professions, competent authorities in each country require assurance that there is a common understanding of the core professional roles and behaviours of sports physiotherapists. Although some culture-specific variations exist, these should also be explicit. A variety of different agencies and individuals can make use of explicit descriptions of the sports physiotherapist's professional behaviours, summarised. Firstly, national regulatory bodies and other competent authorities require the information in order to monitor quality of service provision. Sports physiotherapists must also continue to demonstrate their worth and can use such descriptions to gain recognition. The current political climate emphasises harmonisation of professional education and improvement of mobility in the European Union. This has prompted the development of competencies and standards in physiotherapy and its specialisations [9]. The International Federation of Sports Physiotherapists, representing sports physiotherapists across the globe, acknowledged the need for greater clarity regarding their specialist professional behaviours, to enable greater public and

professional recognition and to develop continuing professional learning. These growing priorities led to a European collaboration with input from internationally renowned experts to develop competencies for sports physiotherapists. The description of professional behaviours is facilitated by the use of a framework that places the patient and client at the centre of their professional roles and behaviours. International documentation was themed by the researcher, and the content confirmed by an expert panel; themes were grouped within the framework, to form the basis for competencies, which underwent a rigorous review and revision process. As sports physiotherapists seek more formal opportunities to fulfil their identified learning needs, it is important that educators are aware of requirements. Descriptions of professional behaviours allow the design of learning opportunities with appropriate content, designed to enable the professional to reach the level of performance required. Professional behaviours must be described alongside an indication of the minimum level of performance [10]. This process is known as benchmarking and can be differentiated into two components, Competency statements describe effective professional behaviours that integrate specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in a particular context and Standards are criteria for performance; they describe the minimum level of capability at which you would expect the professional to work.

## Conclusion

The importance of describing professional behaviour was recognised by the International Federation of Sports Physiotherapy, this led to collaboration with five European higher education institutions to successfully obtain funding for the Sports Physiotherapy for All Project-work.

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## Conflict of Interest

None

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