

## Bridging the Gap: Awareness and Perceptions of Physiotherapy Among Healthcare Professionals

<sup>1</sup>Sandeep Kumar, <sup>2</sup>Smati Sambyal, <sup>3</sup>Nitika, <sup>4</sup>Mohit Kumar, <sup>5</sup>Kanchan

<sup>1,2</sup>Associate Professor, University College of Physiotherapy, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot, Punjab, <sup>3</sup>BPT, University College of Physiotherapy, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot, Punjab, <sup>4</sup>MPT (Orthopaedics), University College of Physiotherapy, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot, <sup>5</sup>MPT (Neurology), University College of Physiotherapy, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot, Punjab

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** In India, physiotherapy plays a vital role in rehabilitation but remains under-recognized compared to other healthcare professions. Despite its increasing relevance, limited awareness among healthcare professionals continues to restrict its effective integration into the healthcare system. This often results in delayed referrals, underutilization of services and gaps in patient care. Therefore, this study aimed to assess healthcare professionals' knowledge and attitudes toward physiotherapy to support more collaborative and timely patient management.

**Material and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted from May to June 2025 involving 82 healthcare professionals from various medical and allied disciplines, each with at least one year of professional experience. Physiotherapists, physiotherapy students, undergraduate students and administrative personnel without clinical roles were excluded. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire via Google Forms to assess awareness and knowledge of physiotherapy. Data analysis was done using SPSS (version 18) and Microsoft Excel 2010.

**Result:** The study revealed that while 100% of participants were aware of Physiotherapy, while 84.1% knew about the Master's program in physiotherapy, awareness of the Ph.D. (54.9%) and Doctorate (37.8%) was lower. Specialties like Orthopaedics (79.3%), Neurology (67.1%), and Sports Physiotherapy (65.9%) were better known compared to Preventive Medicine (20.7%) and Veterinary Physiotherapy (17.1%). Familiarity with advanced techniques was limited; only 15.9% were aware of PNF, 42.7% of NDT and 30.5% of virtual rehabilitation. Most participants considered physiotherapy to be effective (93.9%) and supported the establishment of physiotherapy centers in hospitals (97.6%).

**Conclusion:** This study revealed that while awareness of physiotherapy exists among healthcare professionals, detailed understanding especially of advanced techniques and specializations remains limited. A notable proportion were unfamiliar with modern physiotherapy approaches and postgraduate programs. Despite this, most acknowledged its effectiveness and supported its integration in healthcare. These findings highlight the need for structured educational programs to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and improve patient care.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Healthcare Professionals, Physiotherapy

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**Corresponding Author:** Mohit Kumar, University College of Physiotherapy, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Sadiq Road, Faridkot- 151203, Punjab

**E-mail:** mohitmehta075@gmail.com

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## Introduction

In India, the delivery of healthcare services involves a wide spectrum of public and private providers, including solo practitioners, specialists and large corporate hospitals that offer advanced super-specialty tertiary care.<sup>1</sup> Healthcare professionals are integral to the functioning of modern healthcare systems. According to the World Health Organization they offer vital services aimed at enhancing health, preventing disease and delivering medical care to individuals, families and communities.<sup>2</sup>

Physiotherapy, as an essential component of healthcare, plays a critical role in the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of various health conditions.<sup>3</sup> It refers to the services provided by physical therapists to individuals and populations aimed at developing, maintaining, and restoring optimal movement and functional ability over the course of their lives.<sup>4</sup> Physical therapy, also referred to as physiotherapy and commonly abbreviated as PT, is both a science and an art focused on physical care and rehabilitation. Physiotherapists function both as independent practitioners and as integral members of healthcare teams. Guided by the ethical principles of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT), they are qualified to serve as first-contact practitioners, allowing patients to access their services directly without needing a referral from another healthcare professional.<sup>5</sup>

It is recognized as an essential component in the rehabilitation process for individuals affected by severe conditions resulting from injury or illness. Physical therapy, as a professional discipline, encompasses a wide range of specialties, such as sports rehabilitation, neurology, wound management, cardiopulmonary care, geriatrics, orthopaedics and paediatrics. Among these, neurological rehabilitation is notably one of the fastest-growing areas within the field.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the field also faces several challenges, including limited direct access and autonomy, professional dominance by other healthcare providers, inadequate documentation and use of electronic health records, insufficient evidence-based practice, financial and structural disparities in

service delivery and workplace-related constraints such as lack of resources and manpower.<sup>7</sup>

In developed nations such as the United Kingdom and Australia, it is common for physiotherapists to act as the first point of contact for patients.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, within the healthcare systems of developing countries, physiotherapy is still emerging and remains less established compared to other medical professions.<sup>9</sup> In these settings, physiotherapy is typically practiced based on referrals from physicians across various medical specialties.<sup>10</sup> Although the profession is gradually gaining recognition, effective collaboration between physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals is essential. Awareness of physiotherapy among physicians and other medical doctors can lead to timely referrals, facilitating effective management and making the rehabilitation process less burdensome for patients.<sup>11</sup>

While physiotherapy plays a crucial role in multidisciplinary healthcare, limited studies have specifically assessed the level of awareness and understanding of physiotherapy among healthcare professionals, particularly in regions with developing healthcare systems. The lack of current, localized data on how other medical professionals perceive the scope and importance of physiotherapy creates a gap in fostering effective interprofessional collaboration and patient referrals. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the level of awareness and understanding of physiotherapy among Healthcare professionals.

## Material and Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted from May to June 2025, involving a total of 82 participants recruited from Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital and University College of Nursing, Faridkot. The participants included healthcare professionals who had completed their professional degrees in various disciplines such as MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery), MD (Doctor of Medicine), Nursing, BHMS (Bachelor of Homoeopathic Medicine and Surgery), BAMS (Bachelor of Ayurveda, Medicine and Surgery), MASLP (Master of Audiology and Speech-Language

Pathology), BMLT (Bachelor of Medical Laboratory Technology), Pharmacy, M.Sc. (Master of Science), and Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). All participants were either actively practicing in clinical or academic settings and had a minimum of one year of professional experience.

Participants were excluded if they were undergraduate students who had not yet completed their degrees, physiotherapists or physiotherapy students, or administrative personnel working in the healthcare field without any direct contact with patients or influence in the management of patient treatment.

All selected participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. Data was collected using a self-designed questionnaire developed via Google Forms, which aimed to assess the participants' knowledge and awareness regarding physiotherapy, including its scope, effectiveness, commonly used modalities and the role of physiotherapists in the healthcare system. Content and face validity of the questionnaire were reviewed by a panel of experts (n=3) in physiotherapy and public health. A pilot study was conducted on 10 participants to assess clarity and feasibility of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was calculated and found to be 0.81, indicating acceptable reliability. The questionnaire was distributed to participants through email, allowing them to voluntarily complete and submit their responses.

## Results

The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics, with frequencies and percentages presented in a simplified tabular format.

A total of 82 participants were included in the study consisting of 49 females (59.8%) and 33 males (40.2%). The majority of participants 49 (60%) belonged to the 25–35 years age group. Most participants were from MD program 27 (33%) and a significant proportion had up to 10 years of professional experience 57 (69.5%), as presented in Table 1.

**Table No.1. Distribution of socio-demographic factors of participants under study**

Variables	Options	N=82	%
Age group (in year)	25-35	49	60%
	36-45	23	28%
	46-55	5	6%
	56-65	5	6%
Gender	Male	33	40.2%
	Female	49	59.8%
Academic course	Nursing	18	22%
	MBBS	13	15.9%
	MD	27	33%
	MASLP	8	9.9%
	Ph.D	5	6%
	BMLT	1	1.2%
	BHMS	1	1.2%
	BAMS	2	2.4%
	Pharmacy	2	2.4%
Year of service	Msc	5	6%
	1-10 years	57	69%
	11-20 years	22	27%
	21-30 years	3	4%

All participants (100%) were familiar with the term physiotherapy, with graduate-level education being the main source of awareness (53.7%). While 84.1% knew about the Master of Physiotherapy (MPT), fewer were aware of the Doctorate in Physiotherapy and Fellowship programs (both 37.8%). Commonly recognized specialties included Orthopaedics (79.3%), Neurology (67.1%) and sports Physiotherapy (65.9%), while less familiar areas were Manual Therapy (24.4%), Preventive Medicine (20.7%) and Veterinary Physical Therapy (17.1%).

Participants were more aware of modalities such as Muscle Stimulators (65.9%), Ultrasound Therapy (64.6%) and Exercise Therapy, including the Positional Release Technique (57.3%), whereas knowledge of Biofeedback, Intermittent Pneumatic Compression (18.3%) and Brunnstrom's Approach (6.1%) was limited. Most participants (64.6%) understood that physiotherapy and occupational therapy are distinct and 89% reported using standardized assessment

protocols. Belief in physiotherapy's effectiveness was high (93.9%), with 97.6% supporting dedicated physiotherapy centers in hospitals.

Additionally, 62.2% viewed physiotherapy as vital inpatient care, 72% recognized its use as a first-line treatment in developed countries and 84.1% acknowledged the need for family-centered services. Only 59.8% considered physiotherapy services

affordable. However, misconceptions persisted—many believed its scope was mainly limited to neurorehabilitation (79.3%) and orthopaedic rehabilitation (86.6%), with low awareness of its roles in women's health and burn rehabilitation (both 37.8%). Notably, 50% of those with limited knowledge expressed interest in learning more, highlighting the need for further educational efforts. (shown in table 2)

**Table No. 2. Frequency distribution of the items included in the questionnaire**

Question	Sub question	N (%)
<b>Awareness about physiotherapy</b>		82(100%)
<b>Know about physiotherapy</b>	During Graduation	44(53.6%)
	Through hospital/ medical centres	29(35.4%)
	Mass media	1(1.2%)
	Colleagues	4(4.9%)
	Word of mouth	4(4.9%)
<b>Physical therapy specialisation</b>	Orthopedics	65(79.3%)
	Neurology	55(67.1%)
	Cardio respiratory	38(46.3%)
	Pediatrics	44(53.7%)
	Hand rehabilitation	26(31.7%)
	Sports	54(65.9%)
	Preventive medicine	17(20.7%)
	Women health	24(29.3%)
	Geriatrics	37(45.1%)
	Manual therapy	20(24.4%)
	Community based rehabilitation	26(31.7%)
	Veterinary physical therapy	14(17.1%)
<b>Are you aware of?</b>	Master of physiotherapy	69(84.1%)
	Ph.D Of physiotherapy	45(54.9%)
	Doctorate of physiotherapy	31(37.8%)
	Fellowship in physiotherapy	29(35.4%)

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<b>Level of awareness of modality</b>		
	Shock wave therapy	44(53.7%)
	Ultrasound	53(64.6%)
	Infrared radiation	41(50%)
	Ultraviolet radiation	30(36.6%)
	Muscle stimulator	54(65.9%)
	Laser therapy	37(45.1%)
	Short wave diathermy	28(34.1%)
	Interferential therapy	17(20.7%)
	Electromyography	40(48.8%)
	Bio feedback	15(18.3%)
	Intermittent pneumatic compression	15(18.3%)
	<b>Level of awareness of exercise therapy</b>	
Maitland mobilization		12(14.6%)
Mulligan mobilization		10(12.2%)
Rood's approach		12(14.6%)
Muscle energy techniques		40(48.8%)
Positional release technique		47(57.3%)
Buttle mobilization		17(20.7%)
Neurodevelopmental approach		35(42.7%)
Craniosacral therapy		20(24.4%)
Frenkel exercise		20(24.4%)
Proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation		13(15.9%)
Brunnstrom's approach		5(6.1%)
Virtual rehabilitation		25(30.5%)
<b>Job of physiotherapist</b>		
	Manage neuro rehabilitation	65(79.3%)
	Manage pre/post operative ortho rehabilitation	71(86.6%)
	Manage ICU patient	41(50%)
	Prescribe orthosis and prosthesis	41(50%)
	Manages patient with burns	31(37.8%)
	Gives on field treatment for sports injuries	60(73.2%)

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<b>Role of physiotherapy in health sector</b>	Very important	51(62.2%)
	Important	29(35.4%)
	Not important	2(2.4%)
	Don't know	0
<b>Physical therapy and occupational therapy are same</b>	Yes	8(9.8%)
	No	53(64.6%)
	Don't know	21(25.6%)
<b>Physical therapy is effective option</b>		
	Yes	77(93.9%)
	No	2(2.4%)
	Don't know	3(3.7%)
<b>Therapist follow assessment protocol</b>		
	Yes	73(89%)
	No	9(11%)
<b>Therapy services are expensive</b>		
	Yes	33(40.2%)
	No	49(59.8%)
<b>Need for physiotherapy centres in hospitals</b>		
	Yes	80(97.6%)
	No	2(2.4%)
<b>Need for family physiotherapist</b>		
	Yes	69(84.1%)
	No	13(15.9%)
<b>First line treatment in developed countries</b>		
	Yes	59(72%)
	No	23(28%)
<b>Interested knowing more about PT</b>		
	Lecture	41(50%)
	CME	18(22%)
	Online	23(28%)

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of awareness regarding physiotherapy among healthcare professionals. Analysis of the data revealed that all 82 participants were familiar with the term "Physiotherapy," aligning with the results reported by Agni and Battin (2017).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 53.7% of the respondents reported that they became

aware with the field of physiotherapy during their undergraduate education.

The study further revealed that participants were more familiar with specific branches of physiotherapy, particularly Orthopaedic, Neurological and sports physiotherapy specialties. In contrast, there was significantly less awareness of areas such as Preventive Physiotherapy and Veterinary Physical

Therapy, which is consistent with the findings of Alkesh Shah and Champak Mahyavanshi (2022).<sup>12</sup>

Another study conducted by Ahad and Bhardwaj (2024)<sup>13</sup> assessed the beliefs and awareness of physiotherapy among healthcare professionals. The study revealed generally low levels of awareness within the broader healthcare community, highlighting the need for enhanced educational efforts. These findings align with the present study, which also observed gaps in physiotherapy awareness among Health care professionals.

Moreover, participants demonstrated limited understanding of certain physiotherapeutic modalities, including biofeedback and intermittent pneumatic compression.

A similar gap in knowledge was noted concerning exercise therapy, which is a core aspect of physiotherapy practice. Adequate education and training with regard to physical therapy can help improve public health utilization by enhancing the awareness. Overall, the findings indicate that healthcare professionals lack sufficient awareness and understanding of the broader scope of physiotherapy.

### Limitation

A potential limitation of the present study is that it was carried out at only one Medical University which may limit the applicability of the results to other populations or educational contexts.

### Conclusion

This study revealed that while awareness of physiotherapy exists among healthcare professionals, detailed understanding especially of advanced techniques and specializations remains limited. A notable proportion was unfamiliar with modern physiotherapy approaches and postgraduate programs. Despite this, most acknowledged its effectiveness and supported its integration in healthcare. These findings highlight the need to enhance awareness and understanding of the role of physiotherapy among healthcare professionals through regular seminars and educational lectures.

Additionally, interactive interdepartmental workshops can be conducted in medical colleges, hospitals and clinics to further educate about the field of physiotherapy particularly to strengthen collaboration between medical professionals.

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**Declaration of Conflicts of Interest Statement:** No

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