Physical Therapists Providing Smoking Cessation Education: Attitudes and Potential in a Rural Setting

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Recommended Citation
University Grant Program Reports. Paper 13.
http://scholarworks.umt.edu/ugp-reports/13
University Grant Program 2014-2015, report

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Grant Number:  
Title: Physical Therapists Providing Smoking Cessation Education: Attitudes and Potential in a Rural Setting

Objectives: The primary objective of this pilot study is to focus on physical therapists practicing in a rural setting; where 65% of the Montana population resides. Physical therapists are a key provider of healthcare service and entry into the healthcare system. In this proposed study we want to 1) assess the current state of smoking cessation being offered by physical therapists, 2) determine the viability of physical therapists to provide smoking cessation counseling based on their knowledge, skills and perceptions, 3) try to understand the patients’ perspective regarding a physical therapist providing these services and 4) identify the barriers to physical therapist providing this critical and quality of life saving if not life saving service.

Subjects: An electronic survey was sent via the MT State Board of Physical Therapy Examiners to all currently licensed active physical therapists. 955 requests were sent; of the 252 surveys attempted, 214 were fully completed. The respondents included 167 females (78%) and 47 males (22%), aged 22 to 69 years old. This is representative of the national average of 69.9% women and 30.1% men in the field of PT (APTA).

Methods: This 24 question survey was created using Qualtrics©, LLC survey tool. The survey was approved by the University of Montana’s IRB. Demographic information included: gender, age ethnicity, tobacco use history, primary practice setting and postal code, years of practice, and education. The heart of the study was a series of multi-level questions that spoke directly to the therapists’ knowledge, skills, abilities and willingness to provide TUC services. Such as: the percent of tobacco users encountered in their clinical practice, the extent of their TUC practices and their knowledge of the clinical guidelines for tobacco cessation counseling adopted by the Agency on Health-Care and Quality (AHCQ). Furthermore, we assessed the PTs’ perceptions of the appropriateness and efficacy of incorporating a TUC program in their daily practice as well as the patients’ willingness to participate.

Results: 12.4% of responds reported that less then 5% of their patients were tobacco users, 39.2% reported tobacco use rates above 20%. Surprisingly only 54% of PT's asked their patients about tobacco use at least half of the time, and of those 82% advise users to quit at least 50% of the time. Between 15.2% and 27.6% of PTs engage in some form of TUC education at least half the time. The data clearly demonstrates that PT's are not familiar with the AHCQ TUC (94% of respondents reporting being “Not at all” or “Slightly” familiar). This coincides with greater than
93% of respondents having not received formal training in TUC. The challenges identified that are associated with TUC included: lack of formal training and concerns about reimbursement. However, 68% of PT’s believe they have enough time to include TUC as part of their intervention and 93.5% believe that TUC could be an important aspect of patient care. Of the PT’s surveyed, over 75% stated they would attend a continuing education course if it were readily available.

**Conclusion:** The survey showed that few PT’s in MT are consistently asking their patient about tobacco use and even if they ask the rate of TUC is very low. The negative consequences of tobacco use are clearly understood and accepted. Therefore, as direct access health professionals it is important to provide appropriate TUC knowledge and skills to PTs in the State in order to help reduce the effects of tobacco use. Montana physical therapists have clearly identified their understanding that TUC should be integrated into regular clinical practice and their desire for further training in TUC.

**Clinical Relevance:** PT’s can and should play a pivotal role in reducing the number of patients who use tobacco. The issue is that many PT’s in MT are not trained in TUC. Montana PT’s have demonstrated a willingness to participate in TUC training. Therefore, the development of an appropriate PT oriented TUC training is needed in the State of MT. Given the rural nature of MT and the lack of easy access to health care services PTs are uniquely positioned to provide TUC. If this training proves to be effective in enhancing the tobacco use quit rates then this model could be incorporated nation wide.

**Deliverables:**


**Laskin JL & Levison DL.** The Implementation and Assessment of a Training Program Targeting the Rural Physical Therapist as the Facilitator of Tobacco Use Cessation. Submitted May 2015 $99,427.00. One of four proposals chosen in internal review by UM Office or Research and Sponsored Programs to move forward to the Montana Health Care Foundation. Project was not accepted for full review by Montana Health Care Foundation.