

Exploration of the History of Physiotherapy

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Abstract: *Physiotherapy or Physical Therapy or PT, is a conservative science of the treatment and management after the clinical examination, assessment and diagnosis of the diseases for restoration of the neuro-musculo-skeletal and Cardio-pulmonary efficiencies, managing pain and certain integumentary disorders with the help of physical means like radiation, heat, cold, exercise, current, waves, manipulation, mobilization etc. Many organizations describe physiotherapy in their ways. This paper explores the historical roots of physiotherapy.*

INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapy or Physical Therapy or PT, is a conservative science of the treatment and management after the clinical examination, assessment and diagnosis of the diseases for restoration of the neuro-musculo-skeletal and Cardio-pulmonary efficiencies, managing pain and certain integumentary disorders with the help of physical means like radiation, heat, cold, exercise, current, waves, manipulation, mobilization etc.

Various organizations have defines the Physiotherapy in their own words. Few definitions of them are given below:

The APTA defines the physiotherapy as: “clinical applications in the restoration, maintenance, and promotion of optimal physical function.”¹

The Maharashtra OT PT Council defines the physiotherapy as: “ a branch of medical science which includes examination, assessment, interpretation, physical diagnosis, planning and execution of treatment and advice to any person for the purpose of the preventing correcting, alleviating and limiting dysfunction, acute and chronic bodily malfunction including life saving measures via chest physiotherapy in the intensive care unites, curing physical disorders or disability promoting physical fitness, facilitating healing and pain relief and treatment of physical and psychosomatic disorders through modulating physiological and physical response using physical agents, activities and devices including exercises, mobilization, manipulation, therapeutic

ultrasound, electrical and thermal agents and electrotherapy for diagnosis, treatment and prevention.”²

Physiotherapists use the patient's history and physical examination to make the diagnosis and establish a management plan and in necessity they incorporate the results of laboratory, imaging studies and Electrodiagnostic testing.

Physiotherapy is concerned with identifying and maximizing the quality of life and movement potential within the spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment or intervention, habilitation and rehabilitation which encompasses the physical, psychological, emotional, and social well being.

The texts reveals that the physiotherapy was rooted in 460 B.C. when the physicians like Hippocrates and later Galenus who may be believed to have been the first practitioners of physical therapy used to advocate massage, manual therapy techniques and hydrotherapy to treat people.³

In the 18th century, after the development of orthopedics, machines like the Gymnasticon were developed for the treatment of gout and similar diseases by systematic exercise of the joints, similar to later developments in physical therapy.⁴

The earliest documented origin of the actual physiotherapy is found to be in

Sweden. The Swedish word for physical therapist is “sjukgymnast” (sick-gymnast). Per Henrik Ling who is called he Father of Swedish Gymnastics founded the Royal Central Institute of Gymnastics (RCIG) in 1813 for massage, manipulation, and exercise.

The first use of the word physiotherapy is found in German Language as the word “Physiotherapie” in 1851 by a military physician Dr.Lorenz Gleich.⁵

Physiotherapists were given official registration by Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare in 1887 which was then followed by other countries. The word “Physiotherapy” was coined by an English physician Dr.Edward Playter in the Montreal Medical Journal in 1894 after 43 years of the German term “Physiotherapie”. In his words- “The application of these natural remedies, the essentials of life, as above named, may be termed natural therapeutics. Or, if I may be permitted to coin from the Greek a new term, for I have never observed it in print, a term more in accordance with medical nomenclature than the word hygienic treatment commonly used, I would suggest the term, Physiotherapy” .⁶

In the same year four nurses Lucy Marianne Robinson, Rosalind Paget, Elizabeth Anne Manley and Margaret

Dora Palmerin in Great Britain formed the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.⁷

The first documented professional institution for Physio- therapy training was School of Physiotherapy at the University of Otago in New Zealand which run an entry level program in physiotherapy.⁸

After this the next year or in 1914 in United States, Reed College in Portland, Oregon, graduated “reconstruction aides”.⁹

The establishment of the modern physical therapy is thought to be in Britain towards the end of the 19th century. The American orthopedic surgeons started treating the disable children and started employing women trained in physical education, massage, and remedial exercise. It was promoted further during the Polio outbreak of 1916 and during the First World War when the women were working with the injured soldiers.

The first physical therapy research was published in the United States in

March 1921 in “The PT Review”. In the same year, Mary McMillan organized the physiotherapy association named the American Women’s Physical Therapeutic Association which is currently known as the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

Primarily in the 1940s the treatment consisted of exercise, massage, and traction but later in the early 1950s the Manipulative procedures to the spine and extremity joints began to be practiced especially in the British Commonwealth countries, in the early 1950s.^{10, 11}

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