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Title

Overview of a multi-centred investigation of Direct Access (Patient Self –Referral) to Physiotherapy in Primary Care Settings across Scotland.

Authors

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Introduction

The ability of patients to access physiotherapy services directly (Self-Referral SR), although used widely in private practice and sports clinics has not been the mechanism of access to UK NHS Physiotherapy services. Recent developments within the UK have seen the introduction of a small number of initiatives offering patient self-referral to physiotherapy. This study followed on from the Pilot Study¹ aimed to implement & evaluate patient SR (Direct Access) to physiotherapy services in a number of primary care settings across Scotland.

Method

Location: Study centres involved 12 Health Board areas and 18 locations representing a range of socio-economic and geographical settings. Demographic and clinical data were collected for all Subjects, GP Practices, and Physiotherapy Services over a one year period. Study Design: The project was designed in three parts; Part 1- collection of patient data for Self-Referral and GP Referral groups. Part 2- views of patients, General Practitioners and physiotherapists were sought. Part 3- investigation of GP workload associated with SR. Analysis: Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyse the data (ANOVA, Chi-square) Qualitative data was processed and analysed using Pin-Point Questionnaire software package.

Results: To date 2750 patients recruited to the study (>15000 contacts). Preliminary analysis suggests similar results to those of the pilot study; only 20% of total referrals were Self, 58% GP and further 17% GP-Suggested. Gender breakdown 41%: 59% (M : F). 56% of referrals were in paid employment with 26% retired. There were significant differences between the profile of SR and GPR groups.

Conclusion: Preliminary analysis has confirmed the pilot study results that Self-referral to physiotherapy is a viable option, appropriately accessed by patients. However the proportions and profiles of SR patients varied across locations. The authors will wait until all data has been analysed before making recommendations. Full results available Spring 2005.

¹ Holdsworth, L & Webster, V (2004), Direct access to physiotherapy in primary care:now?- and into the future?, Physiotherapy, Vol. 90, No.2, 55-112