

Are Patients who Refer Themselves to Physiotherapy Different from those Referred by GPs?: Results of a National Trial

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Abstract

Objectives: To establish if there are differences in the profile of patients who refer themselves to physiotherapy compared with those referred by or at the suggestion of their GP in a range of primary care settings

Design of Study: Experimental

Setting: Twenty-nine general practices throughout Scotland.

Participants: 3,010 patients and physiotherapists from throughout Scotland

Method: Self-referral was introduced in each site. The demographic and clinical data relating to all referrals collated over a full year were compared by referral group: self referral (SR), GP suggested (GPS) and GP (GP) referral groups.

Results: There was no relationship between gender or age group and referral group. The groups did differ in their presenting condition ($p < 0.001$) and its severity ($p = 0.027$) with greater proportions of GPS and SR patients presenting with low back and neck conditions ($p < 0.001$) of a lesser duration ($p = 0.011$). Waiting time to physiotherapy ($p < 0.001$) also differed. SR's were absent from work in lesser proportions ($p = 0.048$) and for half the time of the other groups. They also completed their treatment in greater proportions ($p = 0.002$) whilst GPS's had a proportionally lower contact rate ($p < 0.001$). There was no difference in the outcome determined by either physiotherapist or patient.

Conclusions: Both SR's and GPS's appear to have a different profile from that of GP referrals.

