Direct Access Physiotherapy: Challenges and Benefits of the UK Model

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General practice doctors (GP) and/or orthopaedic specialists were once seen as the gatekeepers of musculoskeletal medicine. However physiotherapists are well placed and well skilled to assess and advise patients with musculoskeletal disorders without the need for a referral. Their training beyond simply the musculoskeletal field ensures they are a safe and specialist option to work as first-contact practitioners. Research shows they are an expert professional group (1) and have the same high safety record as general practice doctors, and are very cost effective.

Since 1977 physiotherapists in the UK have been able to act as first-contact practitioners and over the last 14 years, the physiotherapy’s role has changed with the emergence of extended scope practitioners and first-contact practitioners, becoming a powerful resource in helping to shift the health paradigm from secondary to primary care, promoting patient choice and self management within an evidence based framework.

It used to be that patients with a musculoskeletal issue would present themselves to a GP and be managed there, but they would be referred to physiotherapy and/or orthopaedics for investigations. It is estimated that musculoskeletal issues account for 20% of GP appointments and are the most common cause of repeat appointments (2, 3, 4). However, now this GP time can be reduced, and the patient in question can receive the above from a physiotherapist, alongside some specialist advice, improving their journey.

This presentation aims to assess the challenges and benefits of providing a direct access model and evaluate some key research and case studies running such a service.

Literatura/References: