

OCCUPYING A DIFFERENT SPACE:

Views and experiences of the contemporary role of the musculoskeletal ESP

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'We are advancing the scope of our practice'

Background: Extended Scope Practitioners (ESPs) have the clinical skills and capability to make a significant contribution to the delivery of effective health services and positive patient outcomes^{1, 2}.

Study Purpose: To provide an insight into the views and experiences of musculoskeletal physiotherapists working in, or towards, ESP roles. Perceptions about the role were sought including how this specialist role may be developed and supported.

Methods: A qualitative approach, using a focus group method was utilised. All participants were attending a Masters level ESP module. Ethical approval was granted by Coventry University Research and Ethics Committee. Individual, followed by collaborative, thematic transcript analysis was employed.

7 physiotherapists participated:

- 2 x current ESPs
- 1 x Advanced practitioner
- 1 x band 7 / ESP role
- 3 x aspiring ESPs



Findings: Four key themes emerged

'Knowledge and skills to know when to refer the patient onwards ... request any diagnostic tests ... make those decisions to change the management of your patient'

'having the clinical reasoning skills and capabilities for ordering the investigations ... to make a decision quicker, so that it does change the patient pathway'

Commonality and Ambiguity

Participants described ESPs as patient centric, holistic, clinical experts who were big picture thinkers. They said the role was challenging and exciting and involved both diagnostics and pathway management. Ambiguities identified included: role title; job specification; overarching framework; educational, managerial and clinical support.

*'No clear infrastructure'
'Depends on your local area'*

*'Having a managerial ... diagnostic ... and physio head on'
'Your physio hat then you have your more medical hat'
'You bring that extra dimension'*

Making a difference

Benefits for all stakeholders were highlighted: a streamlined patient experience; career development for the individual; networking opportunities for the department; profile raising for the profession; NHS collaborative working, training and cost effectiveness



EXTENDED SCOPE PRACTICE

Occupying a Different Space

The role was said to occupy a unique position in the healthcare system, a bridge between physiotherapy and medical roles. This fusion of managerial, medical and physiotherapy knowledge and skills allowed provision of an extra dimension to patient care

"It's a great thing for our profession ... for the NHS, for our medical colleagues ... for their education too and great for the patients'

'The strength and courage to know and say no when we need to'

Making it Work

Challenges were identified: de-skilling; isolation; increased responsibility and accountability; lack of recognition and poor infra-structure. Strategies to manage included networking, split roles, self governance plus formal and informal education and training.

'One of the big things I enjoy about the role is all the diversity'

'Part of my role is A&E that's completely different to what I do in OP's, I'm really fortunate that I get to do both as I still get to keep the treatment side of things'

Key messages

- Perceived as a challenging but rewarding role
- Clear advantages for all stakeholders
- Current success depends on good teamwork between medical and physiotherapy colleagues plus in-post support
- Future success requires formal and informal education and a national ESP framework

References:

1. Morris et al (2014) Principles to guide sustainable implementation of ESP physiotherapy workforce redesign initiatives in Australia: stakeholders perspective, barriers, supports and incentives. Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare 7; 249-258
2. Saxon et al (2014) Extended roles for allied health professionals: an updated SR of the evidence. Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare 7; 479-488.27