

Title: Defending the art of physical therapy

Purpose:

In this paper an argument is presented for the urgent need to reinvigorate our research agenda with a focus on the study of therapeutic alliance or therapeutic relationships, which are central to the art and practice of physical therapy.

Design:

This is a position paper with a relevant literature review. The authors suggest that the profession has begun to lose sight of an essential "thing that makes us physical therapists." This phenomenon is fueled by an overemphasis on quantitative research and an under-appreciation of clinical expertise and patient values. This imbalance undermines holistic patient-centered approaches.

Market-driven efficiencies in a data-based healthcare environment are stealing time from physical therapy. The authors propose that rigorously produced qualitative and mixed methods studies will yield ample evidence of the importance of the therapeutic relationship to patient outcomes. Such evidence would place the profession in a position to argue for the necessity of time in physical therapy.

Applicants to physical therapy programs say they value the time that the profession, historically, has afforded them with patients. Patients also speak to how much they value that time. The best hope for protecting the time we have with our patients is to graduate generations of therapists who embrace the therapeutic alliance and recognize that time intentionally spent is essential to developing therapeutic relationships.

Relevance:

We need to promote education that fosters engagement and embodied knowledge. The authors suggest that excellence in PT education must incorporate curricula addressing the vital importance of therapeutic alliance and also include training in the skills for developing such unique intentional relationships.

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