

Physiotherapy UK 2021

Preferred presentation type:

Theme and methodology: Transforming Provision

Short description: how your work fits within your chosen theme (50 words)

Demand modelling for the Allied Health Professions (AHP) workforce showed that significant expansion would be needed to successfully deliver on the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP). This project explored how exercise professionals could contribute to the delivery of the NHS LTP within AHP NHS commissioned services.

Main body (500 words)

Title: Understanding the role of exercise professionals in the delivery of the NHS long term plan within AHP services in England.

Purpose: To explore the use of exercise professionals in AHP services and to understand their current and potential role in AHP NHS commissioned services.

Methods: The project had three phases. In phase one an expert panel was established to guide the project. In phase two, an electronic survey was carried out to identify the scope and variation of exercise professionals working in AHP support roles in NHS commissioned services. The survey was piloted and distributed in October 2020 to relevant stakeholders including registered healthcare and exercise professionals using the Qualtrics® online survey tool. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. In phase three semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain further understanding about the experiences of those involved in AHP commissioned services. Topic guides were developed with input from the expert panel and informed by the survey findings. Interviews took place between November 2020 and January 2021. Data were transcribed and initially coded. Coding was then refined, and themes identified.

Results: The expert panel consisted of AHPs (n=4), academics (n=4), service users (n=3), a representative from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (n=1) and members of fitness industry institutions (n=5). The survey was completed by 67 individuals (n=7 service leads, n=36 AHPs and n=24 AHP support workers) and interviews were carried out with 11 individuals (n=5 AHPs and n=6 AHP support worker with exercise qualifications). Overall findings suggested that support workers with exercise qualifications made a valued contribution to AHP services and were considered cost-effective in delivering a specialised intervention, although there were no objective data available to verify these accounts. AHP support workers contributed to a range of tasks which included delivering, monitoring, progressing exercise programmes, onward referral, baseline assessment, designing programmes and discharge. Collated data highlighted inconsistency in the way AHP support workers with exercise qualifications identified themselves, despite similar roles. Variation existed in the level of autonomy for AHP support workers with exercise qualifications, even within the same NHS Agenda for Change band. Attempts to manage this disparity involved numerous governance processes to ensure safe, high quality health care in the context of delegation to support workers. Limited training and development opportunities and the lack of career progression for support workers was consistently acknowledged as a source of frustration and hindrance to individuals fulfilling their potential.

Conclusion(s): The findings suggest that routine data collection is necessary to verify the important role that support workers with exercise qualifications potentially have within AHP services including

the specific contribution that they make to the NHS Long Term Plan. Further work is also needed to develop the professional identity of AHP support workers with exercise qualifications, standardising the qualification requirements in general and specific to a range of settings. Finally, there needs to be clear continuing professional development opportunities and a career development pathway for AHP support workers with exercise qualifications to ensure that their skills are optimised.

Impact: AHP support workers with exercise qualifications potentially have a positive impact on service users lives and offer added-value to the NHS workforce.

Key words (3): support worker, exercise, NHS Long Term Plan

Funding acknowledgements (100 words): This project was commissioned by the CSP as part of a Health Education England funded project.

Ethical approval: University of the West of England Research Ethics Committee (HAS.20.09.014)