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#400WORDS: KNOWLEDGE + ACTION

Contracture prevention: knowledge, understanding, and skills of community occupational therapists and physiotherapists: a survey

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Background

Contractures have a significant negative impact on an individual's quality of life and are costly to social services and the National Health Service (Bartoszek *et al.*, 2015; Clavet *et al.*, 2008). The delivery of contracture prevention can be impacted by inconclusive epidemiology of contractures (Fergusson *et al.*, 2007), the knowledge, understanding and skills of clinicians and the relative emphasis of contracture management within a service (Wetta-Hall *et al.*, 2005).

Aims

This survey aims to determine the current knowledge, understanding and skills used in practice to support individuals at risk of developing contractures within one community rehabilitation service (CRS).

Method

An anonymous survey using Qualtrics® online survey tool was created, peer reviewed and piloted. Band 5 and band 6 occupational therapists (OT) and physiotherapists (PT) within a community rehabilitation service were invited to complete the survey via email in February 2023. All 27 OTs and 28 PTs in the service were emailed the survey link.

Ethical considerations

Ethical procedures were followed in line with the University of West of England Faculty Ethics Committee with local approval from the NHS Trust Research and Development service. Participants received an information sheet and consented to participate.

Results

Seven OT's (26%) and 10 PT's (36%) completed the survey. Seven (41%) participants reported 1-2 years of experience with contractures while 8 (47%) had 5 years or more experience with contractures. Six (40%) had no contracture training. Of those with training, 9 (60%) stated "it was a long time ago" and "specific to positioning aids only". Participants reported "knowledge and understanding of contractures in line with research". Self-reported "confidence and skills deemed effective" was variable based on the body part involved and profession of the respondent. Therapists reported seeing those at risk of contractures once a week, with 10 (64%) assessing all joints. 16 (94%) agreed that contractures are preventable, 10 (67%) are never or only sometimes discussing prevention.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate variability in the CRS therapists' self-reported confidence and skills they utilise for various contracture types. This is despite there being evidence for the skills in the management of people at risk of or having contractures. Participants reported that referrals for people at risk of contractures are not made, therefore prevention cannot occur.

Conclusion

Guidelines from the College of Occupational Therapists and Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Neurology (2015) in addition to other available research will be used to inform future service development initiatives. Work to promote referral of people at risk of contracture is necessary. The delivery of contracture prevention training is required for all staff.

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