Advanced practice physiotherapy for adults with spinal pain: a systematic review with meta-analysis
Lafrance Simone et. al., European Spine Journal 2021, 30:990-1003.

**KEY POINTS:**
1. 18 studies with 9405 subjects (including 2 RCT’s)
2. Compared to existing medical models, APPs
   1. Lowered initial consultation wait times
   2. Provided comparable outcomes for:
      1. Pain
      2. Disability
      3. QOL
      4. Patient satisfaction
3. Lower specialist wait times
4. Manage 89.2% patients independently

**BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE:**
Long wait times for spine specialist consultation is a major source of increased disability and functional burden on patients. Overutilization of diagnostic imaging and prescriptive medications by primary care practitioners has resulted in increased cost to health systems and an opioid dependency epidemic. Advanced Physiotherapy Practitioners (APPs) first emerged in the UK in the 1980’s and are now found in 14% of World Physiotherapy Member Organizations (1) APP’s take on multiple roles beyond the scope of entry to practice training programs. Several countries (UK, New Zealand) have designated APP’s within a spate level of professional registration and protected the title. (2)

**METHODS:**
Two independent reviewers scrutinized 1148 studies meeting standard systematic review and meta-analysis inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eighteen studies that included 9405 subjects were selected for meta-analysis.

**RESULTS:**
APPs were able to significantly lower initial wait times for consultation for spine pain patients and triage them appropriately for imaging, medical and surgical consultation. Concurrently, they were rated as providing comparable outcomes as
spine surgeons for; pain, disability, quality of life, patient and stakeholder satisfaction.

**DISCUSSION:**
In 2018 the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy regulators conducted a survey of all Canadian Physiotherapy registration colleges and orders regarding the status of APPs in each jurisdiction. Several regulatory bodies did not respond and the answers received were highly divergent and generally non-specific.

Summary of responses:
- There is currently no broadly agreed-upon definition of advanced practice.
- There appears to be some confusion and perhaps overlapping/conflicting uses of terms such as specialization, extended practice and advanced practice.
- There are no current plans to create a separate register for APPs or to regulate the term “Advanced Practice”. (3)

APP roles are rapidly emerging in all regions of Canada. Physiotherapists with prior training in; medical imaging, pharmacology, laboratory testing, medical screening and medical/surgical triage skills will be best prepared to take on these new positions as advanced physiotherapy practitioners.

**REFERENCES:**