



Research Paper

The Role of the Physiotherapist as a Mentor in Pediatric Education

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ABSTRACT: The need of young physiotherapists for mentoring guidance during their studies and work is presented in this research work. The aim of the paper is to study the necessity of the mentor institution and to record the areas in which they wish to be assisted. The quantitative research carried out involved 103 young physiotherapists who were asked to answer a special questionnaire created and shared in electronic form. In this research, the physiotherapists in public hospitals, special schools, rehabilitation centers and home therapies in a Greek City is the research sample. The results of the research showed that the role of the mentor is very important for the guidance of the new physiotherapist and recorded that their views are not influenced by their demographic data and their workplaces. Finally, research has shown that young physiotherapists need the help and guidance of a mentor in order to fully develop skills at work.

KEYWORDS: Paediatric Physiotherapy, Support for Physiotherapists, Mentor

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I. INTRODUCTION

The change of modern society, the insight of the physiotherapist, the new learning methods and the pace of work have created new conditions and learning needs for the physiotherapists and the staff in physiotherapy institutions. At the same time, there is a wealth of knowledge for teachers and learners. As such, the need for guidance to develop the careers of the young physiotherapists has arisen. Moreover, a key challenge for participants in the health sector is to develop organizational models that retain the characteristics of the professions [1]. They must be physiotherapy educators and respond to social change and prepare physiotherapists to work effectively [2]. To that end, research will help ensure the development and future of the profession. Maudsley and Strivens (2000) [3] argued that Mentoring would facilitate learning in physiotherapy. It is an important way of professional development where an experienced colleague can facilitate the professional development of a younger colleague [4].

The rest of the paper is structure as follows. Section 2 presents the pertinent literature on this subject. Section 3 presents the research questions and the methodology and Section 4 presents the Results and Discussion of the survey. Finally, the paper summarizes with the Conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Child physiotherapy, which is constantly evolving, is a separate field of adult physiotherapy and is focused on child related issues. Physiotherapists target many ages, from infancy to school age, and aim to improve normal movement as well as the nerve abnormalities or syndromes that occur in children. Physiotherapy interventions help the child cope with difficulties and be able to integrate into his daily activities. Some of the problems faced with physiotherapy in children are listed as follows [5]:

- Childhood cerebral palsy (vojta method),
- Neurological diseases (General),
- Damage to the peripheral nervous system (obstetric paralysis),
- Orthopedic injuries,
- Autoimmune diseases (rheumatoid arthritis in children),
- Neurodevelopmental diseases,
- Respiratory diseases (Bronchial asthma),

- Myopathy - muscular dystrophy,
- Congenital orthopedic injuries (hip arthropods) and
- Acquired orthopedic injuries (fractures).

The role of the Mentor is considered very important in all work, theoretical and practical. The definition is multifaceted and reflects the importance of the function. The word "Mentor" has its roots in ancient Greece and Greek mythology and comes from the Homeric epic *Odyssey* [6]. The role of the mentor is very important and gathers specific characteristics. Overall, then, the mentor is an individual who has the role of guide and tutor in the evolution of a person's life. He has the profile of father and teacher, as well as helper in all aspects of a person's life. His goal is the positive development and therefore he constantly advises and supports the "student". The support does not only concern his professional, but also his personal life. In other words, he is a supporter and collaborator of the individual and guides him in whatever arises. His support is multifaceted, as it seems, and concerns many aspects of the individual's life and various field [7].

According to Eby [8], the role of the mentor is mainly based on counseling and has different way of appearance, depending on the respective work environment. He distinguishes the skills that the mentor must have in those that aim at the success of a job in an organization or business (job-related skills) and in skills related to the personal development and promotion of the trainee in the workplace, with a "career goal (career-related skills). However, he emphasizes that the concept of Mentoring also has negative aspects, mainly on the side of the learner. Ragins & Scandura [9] add the gender dimension and influence to the mentoring relationship, while other researchers emphasize the effect of social background on this relationship (Ragins, 1997a). Moreover, influenced by Kram's conceptual positioning, Bozionelos [10] defines mentoring as a developmental relationship involving individuals at different levels of the same organization or, less frequently, individuals at the same level. Therefore, according to [10], the characteristics of a good mentor is a person that:

- Knows the field of cooperation with the apprentice and be able to integrate him in the respective work and social context,
- Guides him towards a proper cooperation with his fellow citizens and colleagues,
- Teaches the learner to cultivate the values of life,
- Cultivates patience and tolerance in every area of life,
- Builds mutual trust,
- Maintains the uniqueness and special characteristics of the learner,
- Accepts the different point of view, without necessarily embracing it,
- Avoids negative criticism and focuses on positive response, etc.

In the relationship between the mentor and the learner, the former acts as a role model for behavior and professionalism, providing support, direction and feedback "according to the client's professional career and development" [11]. On the other hand, the concept of mentoring is expected to have some negative aspects in its implementation. This is because it is based on human relationships, people with different personalities and perceptions. Therefore, the partnership may display dysfunctional elements [9].

The modern literature shows that physiotherapists need guidance and advice at the beginning of their professional career. To that end, Chao et al. [12] claim that the mentor greatly promotes the professional development of the new physiotherapist. Similarly, in [8], it is argued that the role of the mentor in physiotherapy creates an important relationship with the learner, providing him with support, help and development opportunities in his profession. The role of the mentor is also analyzed by Bozeman & Feeney [13], giving the various definitions of the mentor. All definitions agree that the mentor provides psychological and moral support to the learner and encourage him to develop professionally. The mentor can work either in the same or in a different organization with employees, however it seems that his frequent presence in the workplace is particularly helpful for employees. Therefore, the mentor's relationship with employees helps in the positive development of the young physiotherapist profession and contributes to his success [14,15]. The creation of the mentoring institution within an organized program is ideal for the smooth professional development of the new physiotherapist and the improvement of the quality patients' life, especially of young children.

III. METHODOLOGY

The work explores the need for a comprehensive program that will provide guidance and support in practical and psychological issues of everyday life and help young professionals - especially those involved in pediatric rehabilitation - in their professional careers. At the same time, the research questions to be answered are the following:

- How do physiotherapists perceive the need for support for pediatric or general issues? What support needs do they have?
- In which sub-issues (pediatric or not) did the new physiotherapists need more guidance and support?
- According to physiotherapists, what are the most important characteristics of a training team mentor?
- According to physiotherapists, what are the possible benefits of a training program?

Regarding the data collection method, the research is conducted through a questionnaire which is our research tool. Additionally, the sample will be physiotherapists in public hospitals, special schools, rehabilitation centers and home therapies in a Greek city (i.e Thessaloniki). The questionnaire was designed so that the data collection could answer the above mentioned research questions.

The first section lists the demographic characteristics of the sample: participants are asked about their gender, age, place of work, years of service and educational level. The demographics are intended to present the identity of the sample but also to be controllable variables in the further statistical analysis. The second part of the questionnaire concerns the need for support and guidance of the new physiotherapist. In this section there are ten statements that are answered on a Likert scale of 5 points in which the participant declares his agreement from “Not at all – 1” to “Too much – 5”. In the third section, it is asked exactly where there is need for guidance and support. The answers are given on a Likert scale of 5 points from “Not at all – 1” to “Too much – 5”, as previous. In the fourth section, the question is "In what ways would you like the mentor to assist in your daily practice as a new professional physiotherapist, and to what extent?" In other words, the mentor’s assistance is being considered. Answers are scored on a 5-point Likert scale as previous. The questions in these three sections have been used in the relevant literature [16]. The fifth section of the questionnaire examines the sample's opinion on the ideal characteristics of a physiotherapist mentor. In this sample survey, 15 questions are used regarding three separate sections of characteristics: personal characteristics (questions 1-4), relational characteristics (5-9) and organizational characteristics (10-15). The answers are given on a Likert scale of 5 points from “Not at all – 1” to “Too much – 5”, as previous. In the sixth and last part of the questionnaire, an attempt is made to record the possible benefits of a training program for the new physiotherapist. The sample is asked to note its agreement in 15 statements from 1 - not at all to 5 - too much. The questions include three levels of program characteristics: personal characteristics (questions 1-8), relational characteristics (9-10) and organizational characteristics (11-15) of the training program. The questions in these sections have been used in the relevant literature [17].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research is based on the evaluation of the experiences that physiotherapists had during the first years of their work. The final sample consists of 103 participants who accepted their participation in the research and fully answered all the questions of the questionnaire. Regarding the demographics of the sample, it consists of 50% men and 50% women. Regarding the age category of this sample, it is recorded from 23 years and over, after examining working physiotherapists, who have successfully completed at least their first cycle of studies. 21% of the sample is aged 23 to 30 years, 33% of the sample is aged 31 to 40, 31% of the sample is aged 41 to 50 and the remaining 15% is aged over 50 years. Finally, we observed that the largest portion of the sample is in the ages of 31 to 50 years. These results are presented in graphs presented in Figure 1.

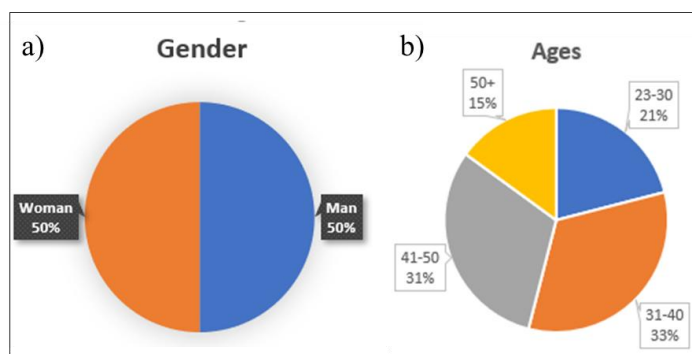


Figure 1: a) Gender percentage of the sample, b) Ages of the sample

Next, we examine the workplace of the sample, as the research is carried out in private and public sector structures. Figure 2 shows that most of the sample - about one in three participants - works in a private physiotherapy clinic (30%). The next largest department (22%) is the one that works in home treatment, followed by the sample that works in a rehabilitation center (22%), in a special school (20%) and finally in a public hospital 14%.

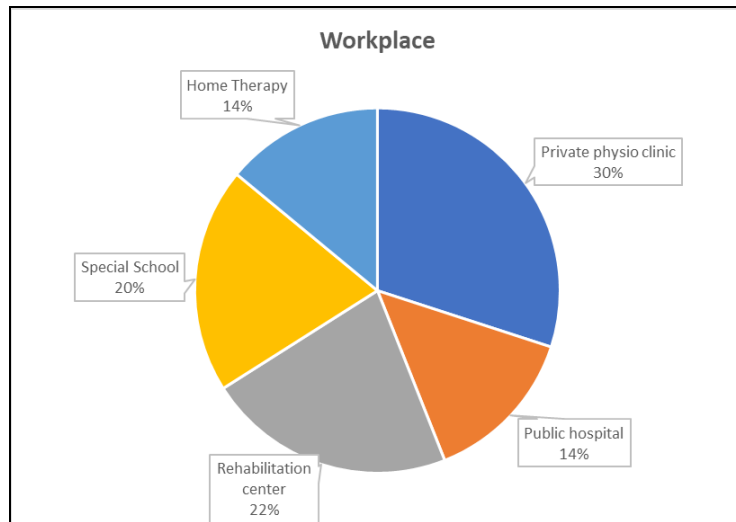


Figure 2: Workplace of the sample

The sample was then asked about his work experience in the specific job, as we expect to study whether this factor can be significantly related to the perceptions of physiotherapists. The work experience of the sample ranges from 1 to 37 years with an average of 9.5 years and a standard deviation of 7.5 (Table 1). At the same time, Figure 3 presents the experience of the sample. From the results of the table we observed that the largest percentage, 40%, has relatively little work experience, from 0 to 5 years, 30% has 6-10 years of experience, 21% has 11-15 years of experience and lower percentages (6 % and 3% respectively) experience 20+ and 30+ years. Finally, we calculated that the average work experience of the sample is 9.67 years with a standard deviation of 7.54.

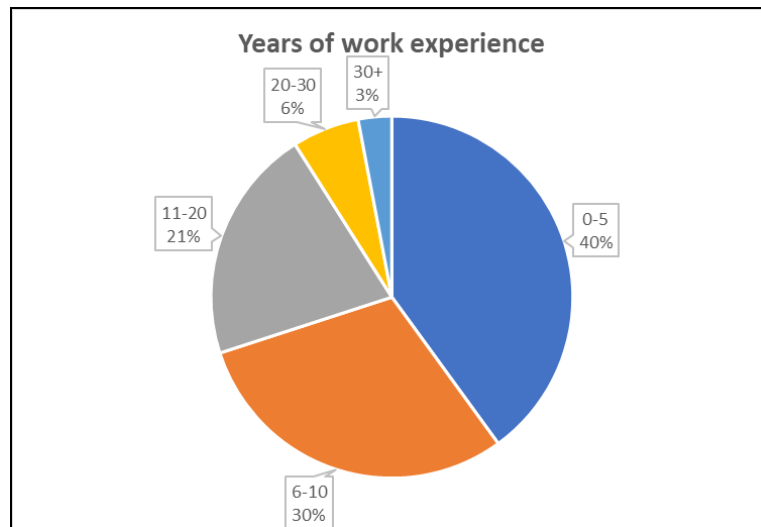


Figure 3: Year of sample's work experience

The last question from the demographics concerns the further education of the sample. The sample was asked about his / her additional studies, having the opportunity to choose one or more of the four additional training options (postgraduate, seminars, pediatrics seminars, no additional studies). The answers show that the majority of the sample (54.5%) have completed postgraduate studies while another large department has attended seminars, whether they concern pediatric physiotherapy (25%) or other seminars (36%). 16.5% of the sample has no further studies, except for its basic course. In general, the sample expresses high averages for the need for guidance and support as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Areas of support and guidance

	N (Sample)	Mean	Std.Dev
As a new professional physiotherapist do you feel you need support and guidance?	103	4,00	1,076
How ready were you immediately after completing your studies to apply what you were taught?	103	3,71	1,177
Organization of your professional environment	103	3,85	1,183
Patient evaluation	103	3,84	1,118
Application of various intervention methods	103	3,89	1,066
Use of technology in therapeutic methods	103	3,79	1,126
Participation in educational programs, research, and innovative actions in therapeutic approaches	103	3,88	1,157
Managing patient relationships and managing appointments with them	102	3,84	1,106
Relationships - working with colleagues	103	3,74	1,244
Self-assessment	100	3,95	1,058
Enhancing the feeling of self-esteem	103	3,85	1,200
Managing stress and insecurity	102	3,77	1,151

Finally, we present in Table 2 the necessity of mentor’s contribution results.

Table 2. Necessity of mentor’s contribution

	N (Sample)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Assistance in the application of new techniques in practice	102	4,38	0,809
Linking theoretical knowledge with practical application	103	4,30	0,712
Correct evaluation	103	4,23	0,910
Implementation of innovative intervention programs	102	4,22	0,897
Guidance in the application of intervention methods	103	4,19	0,981
Conflict management and resolution with patients - relatives	103	4,08	1,036
Create a climate of collaboration with patients and colleagues	101	4,07	1,098
Adapt to the new work environment of physiotherapy culture	103	3,99	1,150
Manage stress and insecurity	103	3,91	1,230
Enhance the feeling of self-esteem	103	3,89	1,267

The next part of the questions deals with the analysis of the desired characteristics of the mentor. The sample was asked which of the following he thinks should be and to what extent, the ideal characteristics of a mentor. The characteristic that presents the highest recognition is to enjoy sharing his knowledge (Mean value 4,63) and to be contagious - to easily interact with others (Mean value 4,57). On the contrary, a less desirable feature is to have sufficient space for work (Mean value 4.07).

The previous statistical analysis proved the significance of the mentor’s presence and its influence in the profession of physiotherapist. His help and guidance are considered very important for the smooth integration of the new professional physiotherapist in the workplace, as he provides personalized assistance on issues of general and specific case management, but also issues of psychological and general professional nature. Upon receiving the degree of physiotherapy, the young physiotherapist already possesses the basic knowledge of his profession, however further guidance is necessary in order to have a smooth professional career. The areas that can be employed and the fields of application of physiotherapy are numerous. Employment can be in a private physiotherapy clinic, in a public hospital, in rehabilitation centers in special schools, but also in-home therapies, and the cases of treatment are varied in both adults and children.

Moreover, as per the above research and certified by the literature, in the relationship between mentor and learner, the Mentor functions as a model for mimicking behavior and professionalism, providing support, direction and feedback [18]. This relationship is formed through the responsibility caused to the members involved, as it facilitates not only personal but also professional development [19].

V. CONCLUSION

Summarizing and based on the insights of this research work, it is concluded that the creation an organized program for support and guidance through "mentor" is considered as the ideal for the smooth integration in the physiotherapist profession. Additionally, the mentor's existence in the first professional steps is characterized as ideal development of the physiotherapist. Last but not least, the pediatric cases need special treatment, management, approach and evaluation, which varies depending on age and condition, but also with the environment and the stimuli that each child has received. Through professional development, young employees can contribute to improving their work and understanding their responsibilities. Finally, based on the results of our research we concluded that the majority of physiotherapists needed guidance and support at the beginning of their professional careers.

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