

A protocol for the development of professional competencies: the SPA Project.

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Introduction

Competencies are descriptions of professional behaviours. The importance of developing competencies has grown in recent years, with increasing specialisation. Professions have been extending their boundaries and it has become important to describe the roles and behaviours that make a specialisation distinct.

Table 1: Selected uses of professional competencies

Level	Examples
Policy	Increasing international mobility; Increasing professional recognition nationally and internationally;
Education	Appropriate design of educational opportunities; International harmonisation of education, integrating flexibility;
Service Delivery	Design of employment specifications, job descriptions; Integration into quality assurance mechanisms;
Individual	Recognition of roles and capabilities; Identification of individual learning needs and design of an action plan;

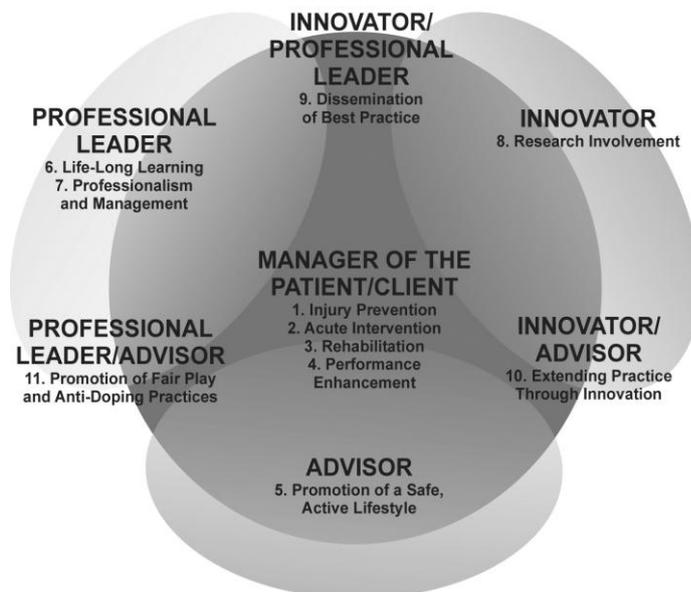
Sports physiotherapy has faced the challenge of describing the characteristics that make it distinct from other specialisations within physiotherapy, and from other professions within the sporting domain. Transparency in the communication of professional behaviours is important at various levels, summarised in Table 1.

Competencies integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004). In reality, professional behaviours form a continuum. However, they must be differentiated to allow communication. This was one of the first tasks of the Sports Physiotherapy for All (SPA) Project.

Methods

Content analysis was undertaken for international documentation relating to expectations and education of sports physiotherapists in 16 countries. International similarities and differences were explored. An appointed panel of expert sports physiotherapists cross-checked emerging themes to ensure that they were comprehensive. The expert panel allocated these themes to roles within a competency model (Coppoolse & Van den Heuvel, 2004) that provided a structure for competency development. Related themes were then grouped to form the areas for sports physiotherapy competencies. Once consensus was reached, the competency statements were written. The document underwent a rigorous process of internal and external review and revision. It was unanimously accepted at the International Federation of Sports Physiotherapy General Meeting in November 2004.

Figure 1. Sports physiotherapy competency areas



Results

Eleven competency statements describe Master's-level expectations of sports physiotherapists that involve elements of specialism and build on the competencies of graduate physiotherapists. Figure 1 summarises the competency labels, within the role-based model (Coppoolse & Van den Heuvel, 2004). Each statement is accompanied by a description (Bulley, et al., 2004).

Discussion/Conclusion

The next stages of the project are underway: behavioural standards based on the competency areas have been written and reviewed. An audit tool is being developed, and will be piloted internationally. Website resources are available to inform the public and facilitate professional development. The ability to provide evidence for competencies and locate routes to further progression will promote mobility and recognition of sports physiotherapists throughout Europe.

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References

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