

My Local Physio: A Quality Improvement Project to Identify the Clinical Need and Justification for a Physiotherapist to be Employed in a General Practice

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Abstract

Background: General practice in the United Kingdom is experiencing increasing workload pressures due to rising consultation rates, workforce shortages, and growing patient complexity. Musculoskeletal disorders (MSKDs) account for a substantial proportion of primary care consultations and represent a potential area where alternative models of care could improve efficiency. The integration of physiotherapists into primary care teams has been proposed within Primary Care Networks to manage MSK conditions and reduce general practitioner (GP) workload.

Aim: To determine the proportion of GP consultations related to musculoskeletal disorders in a medium-sized suburban general practice and evaluate the potential clinical need for an in-house physiotherapist.

Methods: A retrospective audit of consultation records was conducted at Hickings Lane Medical Centre using the SystemOne appointment ledger. A total of 400 consultations were reviewed, including 250 consultations during a winter period (02/12/2019–06/12/2019) and 150 consultations during a summer period (03/06/2019–04/06/2019). Consultations involving MSK conditions that could potentially be managed by a physiotherapist were identified. Patient age, gender, and presenting complaint were also recorded.

Results: Overall, 16.75% (67/400) of consultations were related to MSK conditions. Seasonal variation was observed, with 11.2% (28/250) of consultations during winter and 26% (39/150) during summer relating to MSK complaints. Most patients presenting with MSK conditions were aged over 50 years (57%). Females accounted for 57% of cases and males 43%. The most common presentations were back pain (24%), shoulder problems (16%), and knee conditions (15%).

Conclusion: MSK conditions represent a significant proportion of GP consultations, particularly during summer months. These findings suggest that integrating a physiotherapist into a general practice setting may help reduce GP workload and improve access to specialist MSK care. Further research with larger datasets is required to evaluate the clinical and economic impact of this model.