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## Professionalism Among Young Physical Therapists in Pakistan

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The primary objective of a physical therapist's professionalism is to enhance their understanding and expertise within their field, allowing them to practice independently and fulfill their responsibility as a competent professional, hence be accountable to society. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) defines professionalism as encompassing seven fundamental elements: Respect, Compassion, Integrity, Altruism, Accountability, Excellence, and social responsibility. The present study aims to assess the level of professionalism exhibited by young physical therapists in Pakistan based on the core values established by APTA. **Methods:** 100 physiotherapists, with no more than 1 year of experience after completing their graduation, and currently employed in a clinical setting, were selected for inclusion in the study, whereas those with a postgraduate degree or those working in academic or other non-clinical settings were excluded. The research employed a quantitative cross-sectional design, and data was collected using APTA's core-values "self-assessment" tool. **Results:** According to results 37(45.1%) female and 4(22.2%) male, total 41 physical therapists said that they always respond to the patients/clients' needs and goals. It was found that 34(41.5%) of them reported of always trying to gain knowledge and seeking improvement in quality of care of the patient. **Conclusions:** it was concluded that majority of the physical therapists are fulfilling their duties with great care and responsibility. They care about the patients' needs and concerns and that professionalism is the key element in the field of physical therapy.

**Keywords:** Professionalism, Physiotherapists, Healthcare, Rehabilitation, Independent Practice.

#### INTRODUCTION

Each healthcare profession has its own set of ethical guidelines that must be adhered to by professionals to effectively carry out the core mission and fulfil the objectives associated with their specific field. These guidelines encompass both formal and informal expectations, which healthcare professionals are required to follow and stay updated with the evolving trends in their profession. In line with the Healthcare Leadership Alliance, professionalism is defined as the capacity to harmonize and synchronize personal and organizational behaviour with established professional standards, while assuming responsibility and demonstrating dedication to the well-being of patients and society at large, with the ultimate goal of advancing the profession (1). A profound comprehension of codes of conduct and appropriate behaviour towards patients and fellow healthcare professionals is indispensable for all healthcare practitioners. This understanding serves as a crucial metric to assess and validate a healthcare professional's standing within the community (2). According to De Rosa in 2006, professionalism is all about doing

the right thing regardless of how one feels about it (3). The establishment of trustworthiness and reliability among patients is fundamentally rooted in the behaviour and conduct displayed by healthcare professionals towards them (4). Doctors and other healthcare professionals bear a significant burden in fostering and upholding professionalism within their field. Achieving this entails enhancing the medical admission process, augmenting the provision of formal and experiential education focused on professionalism, and eradicating unprofessional conduct from the working environment (11). Professionalism may change over time with experience and clinical practice, and with the ability to adequately define valid and reliable measures that incorporate behaviours values, and attitudes (7). The primary objective of a physical therapist's professionalism is to enhance their understanding and expertise within their field, allowing them to practice independently and fulfil their responsibility as a competent professional, hence be accountable to society (5,6). According to American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) vision 2020, a six elements plan was presented in 2000. This was reviewed by boards of directors of APTA in 2003 and was named as a core document on professionalism in physical therapy education, practice, and research. These elements include Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), Evidence Based Practice (EBP), Autonomous practice, Direct access, Practitioner of choice, and Professionalism. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) has developed the Professionalism in Physical Therapy Core Values Self-Assessment tool to increase awareness of personal values and medical ethics in physical therapy practice (8). According to APTA, Professionalism is basically composed of seven general components. The first one is Respect for all, followed by other elements which are Compassion, Integrity, Altruism, Accountability, Excellence and Social responsibility. Physical Therapists must prioritize a commitment to excellence and possess a deep understanding of their clients' limitations. By formulating precise and effective plans, they can successfully address and overcome these limitations (9-10). Nowadays physiotherapists have more autonomy than before. In past years they use to work under a physician always, but now Physical therapy is changing from an occupation to a profession. They have gained the power of autonomy which restores their status in medical field. Professionalism in physiotherapy may be collective in how physical therapists deal with this profession as a whole, how they practice it, how they react or what beliefs they have (12,13). Excellence, accountability, altruism, integrity and trustworthiness are the basic professional ethics values on the basis of which the current study assessed the professionalism among young physical therapists in Pakistan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted at Riphah College of Rehabilitation Sciences (RCRS), Islamabad. 100 physiotherapists, with no more than 1 year of experience after completing their graduation, and currently employed in a clinical setting, were selected for inclusion in the study, whereas those with a postgraduate degree or those working in academic or other non-clinical settings were excluded. A quantitative cross-sectional design was used, and the data was collected using APTA's core-values "self-assessment" tool. Ethical consent was taken from institutional review board and ethical committee of RCRS, Islamabad. Data was analyzed and frequencies and percentages of all seven core values of professionalism were calculated using the SPSS version 25.

## RESULTS

Based on the analysis of 8 fundamental professional ethics values, it was found that a majority of young physical therapists in Pakistan demonstrate professionalism. The data revealed that in terms of "Accountability," 41% of physical therapists consistently respond to patient needs, while 40% do so frequently. Additionally, 39% of the selected PTs always seek feedback from multiple sources. When it comes to accepting the consequences of their actions, 45% of PTs frequently do so, and the same percentage always adhere to ethical standards of practice. In terms of assuming responsibility for learning and change, 46% of therapists always exhibit this behaviour, and 48% frequently communicate accurately about their professional actions. Moreover, 52% responded that they frequently participate in achieving health goals, and 43% always strive for improvement in the quality of care they provide. However, the analysis also highlighted areas where young PTs in Pakistan show a lack of professionalism. Only 20% always maintain professional membership, and merely 35% consistently remain involved in educating students. (Table.1)

**Table 1.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Accountability.

ACCOUNTABILITY					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Responding to patient's goals and needs.	0%	4%	15%	40%	41%
Seeking feedback from multiple sources.	0%	8%	42%	39%	11%
Accepting consequences of own actions.	1%	9%	13%	45%	31%
Assuming responsibility for learning & change.	0%	3%	21%	29%	46%
Adhering to code of ethics & standards of practice.	0%	4%	19%	32%	45%
Communicating accurately to others about professional actions.	1%	5%	11%	48%	34%
Participating in achievement of health goals of patients.	0%	3%	16%	52%	29%
Seeking improvement in quality of care.	0%	3%	19%	35%	43%
Maintaining membership in APTA and other organizations.	33%	13%	20%	13%	20%
Educating students that facilitating pursuit of learning.	1%	14%	16%	33%	35%

**Table 2.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Altruism..

ALTRUISM					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Placing patient's needs above own.	2%	7%	19%	38%	34%
Providing pro-bono services.	6%	13%	28%	38%	14%
Providing services to underserved populations.	4%	12%	19%	40%	24%
Providing services beyond expected standards of practice.	4%	17%	31%	33%	15%
Completing patient care & responsibility prior to personal needs.	2%	7%	17%	44%	30%

According to the analysis focusing on elements of Altruism, it was found that 38% of PTs frequently prioritize the needs of their patients over their own, while 34% always do so. Additionally, 40% of PTs frequently offer services to underserved populations, and 33% frequently go beyond the expected practice standards. Furthermore, a majority of 44% of PTs frequently finish patient care before attending to their personal needs, with 30% always doing so. (Table.2) males.

Analysis of compassion and care revealed that 40% PTs always understand external influences on one's life with 41% frequently doing so. 47% frequently understand individual's perspective followed by 43% who frequently take individual differences in consideration. 40% of young PTs practicing in Pakistan always design treatment plan congruent with patient needs while 44% always demonstrate respect for others and empower patients to gain highest functional level. Those who always refrain acting on cultural and sexual basis account for 42%. Only 29% always take patient's psychological aspects into consideration and merely 27% always attend to patients' personal needs. (Table. 3)

**Table 3.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Compassion & Care.

COMPASSION AND CARE					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Understanding the external influences on individual's life.	1%	4%	14%	41%	40%
Understanding an individual's perspective.	1%	4%	17%	47%	31%
Being an advocate for patient's needs.	3%	7%	19%	42%	29%
Communicating effectively taking individual differences in consideration	0%	6%	13%	43%	38%
Designing patient program congruent with patient needs.	1%	5%	19%	35%	40%
Empowering patients to gain the highest level of function.	1%	5%	19%	30%	44%
Achieving the greatest well-being for patient	1%	6%	18%	38%	37%
Refraining from acting on social, cultural, gender, and sexual biases.	4%	7%	8%	38%	42%
Embracing patient's emotional and psychological aspects of care.	7%	5%	14%	45%	29%
Attending to the patient's personal needs and comforts.	5%	9%	18%	41%	27%
Demonstrating respect for others.	1%	4%	13%	38%	44%

The findings based on "Excellence" revealed a lack of investment in physical therapy, with only 12% always investing in their

field. Among the total participating physical therapists, 20% consistently displayed intellectual humility and had evidence to back their clinical decisions. In terms of tolerance for ambiguity and sharing knowledge with others, 40% demonstrated these qualities frequently, while 40% consistently exhibited them. Only 27% consistently demonstrated high-level skills and a commitment to acquiring new knowledge. (Table. 4)

**Table 4.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Excellence.

EXCELLENCE					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Investment in physical therapy.	6%	16%	32%	32%	12%
Internalizing the value of evidence to support practice and decisions.	3%	9%	29%	39%	20%
Participating in integrative practice to promote high quality health & educational outcomes.	2%	8%	21%	42%	27%
Conveying intellectual humility in professional and personal situations.	3%	4%	27%	46%	20%
Demonstrating high levels of knowledge & skill in all aspects of the profession.	0%	7%	28%	38%	27%
Using evidence to support professional decisions.	0%	9%	28%	38%	24%
Demonstrating a tolerance for ambiguity.	1%	10%	30%	40%	18%
Pursuing new evidence to expand knowledge.	3%	8%	22%	39%	28%
Acquisition of new knowledge throughout professional career.	2%	8%	21%	42%	27%
Sharing one's knowledge with others.	7%	6%	12%	35%	40%
Development and shaping of excellence in all roles.	2%	8%	13%	41%	36%

In terms of professional integrity, 39% physical therapists frequently, while 37% always followed and obeyed the rules and laws related to the physical therapy profession. Unfortunately, 6% never followed the rules which is a less number but is of high concern. A great percentage of 61% PTs have always been trustworthy. Confrontation of harassment and biases is always expressed by 23% while frequently expressed by 33%. Regarding selection of employment, 44% always choose job that is congruent with ethical standards of practice. 42% always make appropriate referrals recognizing limits of own expertise. (Table. 5)

**Table 5.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Integrity.

INTEGRITY					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Abiding by the rules, regulations, and laws	6%	8%	10%	39%	37%
Adhering the highest professional standard	2%	5%	26%	39%	28%
Articulating ideals & professional values.	2%	6%	24%	50%	18%
Using power judiciously.	7%	10%	34%	26%	22%
Resolving dilemmas, respect to core values.	3%	6%	32%	31%	28%
Being trustworthy.	1%	3%	9%	26%	61%
Taking responsibility in management of patients	1%	5%	17%	39%	38%
Knowing limitations & acting accordingly.	2%	7%	14%	40%	37%
Confronting harassment and bias	10%	10%	24%	33%	23%
Recognizing the limits of expertise & making referrals appropriately.	1%	3%	15%	39%	42%
Choosing employment congruent with values & ethical standards.	2%	5%	22%	44%	27%
Acting on values even when results of behavior may place oneself at risk.	5%	12%	22%	46%	15%

Analysis of responses to elements of "Professional Duty" showed that 44% of the physical therapists frequently showed and presented their profession by providing maximum care as possible and 35% always done so. 42% of the physical therapists always facilitated and supported patient/client achievements and health goals. Majority of the physical therapists i.e., 40% always and 34% frequently supported and promoted their profession. 44% always feel proud to be a physical therapist. (Table. 6)

**Table 6.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Professional Duty.

PROFESSIONAL DUTY					
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS
Demonstrating beneficence by "optimal care".	2%	4%	15%	44%	35%
Facilitating individual's achievement of goals	1%	1%	14%	42%	42%
Preserving the safety, security and confidentiality in all contexts.	1%	1%	17%	35%	45%
Involved in professional activities beyond practice.	5%	16%	23%	42%	14%
Promoting profession of physical therapy.	1%	8%	17%	34%	40%
Mentoring others to realize their potential.	2%	7%	23%	35%	33%
Taking pride in profession.	2%	5%	14%	35%	44%

According to findings from the study on "Social Responsibility," it was revealed that 28% of physical therapists consistently prioritized the health needs of their patients/clients and ensured their access to healthcare facilities. In contrast, only 9% of physical therapists consistently engaged in political campaigning, while 30% never did, and 22% rarely participated in such activities. When it comes to community involvement, approximately 17% of physical therapists consistently demonstrated leadership, whereas 42% frequently did so. Additionally, 18% of physical therapists always took part in cultivating relationships with other healthcare professionals and the general public. (Table. 7).

Plasmodium species were also differentiated among the collected samples. Out of 1146 total cases, 113 cases were identified as Plasmodium falciparum, while 1033 cases were found as Plasmodium vivax (Table 2). (Figure 3) shows the graphical representation of different species of plasmodium among the collected positive samples.

**Table 7.** Percentage of PT's Responding to elements of Social Responsibility.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY						
	NEVER	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	FREQUENTLY	ALWAYS	
Advocating health wellness needs of society	1%	4%	15%	51%	28%	
Promoting cultural competence	1%	11%	26%	43%	19%	
Promoting policy effecting function, health & wellness needs	3%	8%	18%	44%	27%	
Ensuring social policy, in patient's interest	2%	19%	16%	42%	21%	
Advocating changes in rules, & guidelines that affect PT service	3%	13%	26%	33%	24%	
Promoting community volunteerism.	1%	12%	34%	33%	20%	
Participating in political activism.	30%	22%	16%	23%	9%	
Participating in societal health goals.	2%	16%	15%	42%	25%	
Understanding global issues, impact on health & PT	1%	5%	26%	48%	18%	
Providing community leadership	4%	16%	30%	33%	17%	
Participating in collaborative relationships	1%	15%	24%	42%	18%	
Ensuring social justice, economic efficiency of services.	2%	12%	26%	40%	20%	

## DISCUSSION

As per the results, our study suggests that most of the physical therapists try to respond to the patients/clients' needs and goals and always trying to gain knowledge and seeking improvement in quality of care of the patient. According to our results, more males were inclined towards keeping the patient/client needs and concerns above their own needs. More female physical therapists were inclined towards providing free of cost services to their patients than male physical therapists. Physical therapists also reported to be compassionate and caring towards their patients while keeping their cultural aspects in mind. Unfortunately, a lesser number of physical therapists reported to be gaining further excellence in their field and participated less in investing in their profession. Most of the physical therapists tried to maintain the integrity of their profession by following and obeying all the rules related to physical therapy. They also followed their social responsibilities and kept good relations with other health care professionals in order to complete their social and professional duties. Professionalism is required to gain and achieve good status in society. One of the studies conducted on DPT students by Furgal KE et al was very much similar with current study on the basis of measuring tool using APTA tool for professionalism, core-values "self-assessment" as a questionnaire. It was conducted on the DPT students, and they assessed themselves with the APTA self-assessment tool, their study showed clearly that development of professionalism is a key part of professional education in DPT students as well as in professionals. This study



also showed and confirmed that professionalism brings a positive change in Physical therapy profession and as well as in among young physical therapists themselves. Being a good professional physiotherapist and following all the core values of professionalism given by APTA, is a good sign for the growth and success of this noble profession as our study also suggested (14).

Another study conducted by Deborah Anderson and Kent E Irwin showed that professionalism is playing an important role in physical therapy profession and its application in clinical setups is advanced due to autonomous practice, which is also suggested in current study. They included 43 physical therapists and analyzed them on the basis of APTA core values self-assessment tool as also used in our study. They analyzed the physical therapists after three weeks of clinical experience and again at 33-week clinical experience. It was a pre-post study. Their study concluded that the core value assessment was better after 33 weeks as the physical therapist grew more professional with time and practice. whereas current study did not differentiate between physical therapists based on clinical experience but puts forward a notion that a physical therapist's professionalism grows with time and experience as he excels in his career based on learning (15). A qualitative study was conducted in 2011 showed that the professionalism comes from different settings such as from classroom or through experience gained. It has different concepts originating from different contexts evolving from person to person depending on the setting they work in cultural competence can vary from country to country such as physical therapists from Australia could not interpret the context of cultural competence in professionalism. But in Pakistan, according to our study, cultural competence plays a huge part in the formation of our results (16).

An editorial published in 2019 suggested that instead of implementing the what and how of professionalism we need to focus on the why of professionalism as conditions change in different situations and a physical therapist must mold himself into that particular condition. The students should be discussing and reflecting upon the basics of professionalism in the classroom to implement those in the future. Our study also suggests that the seven values of professionalism should be taught in the classroom to engrave that into the minds of the students (17).

Further advancements can be made on this topic as the literature found in Pakistan was not very extensive. Future researchers can add some more comparisons between some other characteristics of the physical therapists as being a good professional not only consists of some numbered items but can include many other aspects.

This research is also very useful for freshly graduated physical therapists because they can understand the strength and weaknesses of this field through this study. All Pakistani physical therapists should try to maintain membership in APTA and other health related organizations because studies have shown that physical therapists who are APTA members have a generally positive attitude toward evidence-based practice and also, they are very interested in increasing their skills and knowledge to use it for the improvement of their patients/clients.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study it was concluded that majority of the physical therapists are fulfilling their duties with great care and responsibility. They care about the patients' needs and concerns. It was also concluded from the study that they provide excellent treatment and acquired high level of modern education and knowledge for the betterment and improving the health and physical limitation of their clients. They follow the rules and regulations and fulfill their professional duty in the society with honor. The study shows that professionalism is a key element in the field of physical therapy. In order to gain the trust of the patient/client we have to follow all the core values of professionalism to be a good professional in order to improve the value of this profession and to treat the community well.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None to declare.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION**

HK designed the study and conceptualized the manuscript. AJ handled manuscript writing, statistical analysis, and compiled

results. MN assisted with writing and revisions. SR supervised the project, while ST contributed to graphical representation and proofread the manuscript.

#### AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

N/A

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None to declare.

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