Primary Contact Physiotherapy

Summary
Using physiotherapists in the ED is beneficial when high numbers of musculoskeletal ED attendances are leading to long wait times. Key Principles for Primary Contact Physiotherapy are;

- Senior musculoskeletal physiotherapists assigned a code to take patients directly off the triage list
- Assess patients with musculoskeletal injuries and take full responsibility for their care
- Patients seen in a primary care role and not required to see a medical practitioner

Key dates
Nov 2015 - Jul 2017

Implementation sites
Queensland Health Emergency Departments with high numbers of musculoskeletal presentations.

Partnerships
Collaboration between Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service, QEII, TPCH, RBWH, Princess Alexandra Hospital and Cairns Hospital has helped facilitate standardisation of the Emergency physiotherapy practitioner (EPP) role.

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Aim
The aim is to manage these patients in a primary contact capacity, rather than all patients being seen by a doctor in the first instance. Musculoskeletal patients are seen by a physiotherapist first, and only referred to a doctor when necessary.

Benefits
- Reduced wait time
- Reduced occupancy time
- Improved patient care of musculoskeletal injuries
- Improved use of skill base (allow more time for doctors to manage time critical patients)

Background
An ageing population with increased chronicity of disease coupled with increased expectations of health consumers have led to increased demands on emergency departments. Experienced musculoskeletal physiotherapists working in emergency departments can be the first point of contact for patients with simple, semi-urgent and non-urgent peripheral musculoskeletal injuries, resulting in decreased waiting times and length of stay for patients without any adverse effects.
Solutions Implemented
Models of care vary across the state. Some health services employ physiotherapist in an early assessment medical unit or MAPU, which may be located near the ED. Robina Hospital has successfully implemented the HWA (Health Workforce Australia) sponsored Advanced Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Clinical Education Framework (Emergency Department) resulting in an advanced scope primary contact EPP role being established. The Prince Charles Hospital (TPCH), Cairns Hospital Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital (QEII), and Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital (RBWH) have also implemented primary contact physiotherapy services.

Evaluation and Results
Formal evaluation not completed.

Lessons Learnt
Development of formal role descriptions, competency and training guidelines, and governance and evaluation frameworks support statewide implementation of an EPP model.

References

Further Reading
Primary Contact Physiotherapy in the Emergency Department Framework
The Prince Charles Hospital Early Assessment Medical Unit
Logan Bayside Health Roundtable Presentation: Allied Health and Discharge Planning
New South Wales Emergency Care Institute Research: Impact of the Emergency Physiotherapy Practitioner
Health Victoria Primary Contact Physiotherapy

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