

Pandemic Planning— Key Considerations for Physiotherapists

Introduction

A pandemic is an outbreak of infectious disease that has spread through human populations across a large region making it a worldwide concern. Although the timing and location of a pandemic outbreak is difficult to predict, there are steps that can be taken to be prepared and be responsive should a pandemic outbreak occur.

Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) have a number of resources to guide organizations and individuals in preparing for and responding to a pandemic.

Background

The College has two significant and different responsibilities in pandemic planning. The first is to continue its regulatory activities (registration, quality assurance, practice support and investigating concerns about physiotherapists) to ensure public protection in unusual times. The second is to act as an information conduit to ensure appropriate knowledge dissemination to physiotherapists.

As health care providers, physiotherapists have certain obligations in such circumstances. Understanding what is happening in the broader environment, translating this to individual practice contexts and ensuring patient safety are key professional responsibilities.

Physiotherapists also possess an array of skill sets to contribute in the event of a pandemic. These include, but are not exclusive to:

- delivering care to susceptible or diagnosed patients
- considering risks to practice and utilizing an ethical framework to determine individual roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- opting to assume additional skills under delegation to facilitate care delivery in unusual circumstances (e.g., providing injections)

Position

It is the position of the College that physiotherapists who practice in any category of registration should consider the following key issues in relation to their professional role and responsibilities in the event of a pandemic:

- To be aware of the characteristics of the pandemic (e.g., severity, virulence, modes of transmission etc.) and be informed regarding provincial and local response plans, particularly the role of physiotherapists and the opportunities for participation
- To establish and maintain a link with a public health communication source to ensure that current and relevant information is available for personal ongoing decision making
- To maintain and make available resources, appropriate to the practice setting and provider role, for purposes of personal and public safety; this includes the implementation of any safety precautions, such as infection prevention and control
- To consider personal competencies relevant to the provision of care during a pandemic and develop an individual plan for decision making and involvement
- To make decisions regarding provision of care based on consideration of the profession's Code of Ethics or within a similar ethical framework
- To work within the legislative structure of the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA) when considering new roles and responsibilities (for example injections or intubation)
- To comply with government directives as announced pre, during and post pandemic

References and Resources

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC)

Responsible for ensuring comprehensive provincial response to a pandemic in Ontario including: communicating information provincially to health care workers in partnership with various organizations such as the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario.
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca>

Public Health Ontario—<http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Pages/default.aspx>

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)—<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

The World Health Organization (WHO)—<http://www.who.int/en>

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