

Infection Control

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario physiotherapists in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained.

Introduction

Appropriate infection control is an essential element of clinical practice management based on its critical importance to the health and safety of patients, practitioners and the broader community.

Knowledge of clinical infection control measures is continually growing and specific clinical advice continues to evolve. However, the basic principles underlying appropriate infection control practice embedded in professional expectations in this area remain constant.

This standard describes the College's expectations of registrants as they relate to the incorporation of appropriate infection control measures into their professional practices.

Standard Statement

In the event of any inconsistency between this standard and any legislation that governs the practice of physiotherapists, the legislation governs.

When providing professional services, registrants will ensure that they incorporate current, appropriate, and generally accepted infection control measures, policies and procedures.

Performance Expectations

A physiotherapist demonstrates the standard by:

1. Maintaining current knowledge of evidence-based infection control protocols relevant to his or her professional practice.
2. Adopting appropriate infection control measures in his or her professional practice and monitoring their use and effectiveness to identify problems, outcomes and trends.
3. Ensuring that the infection control measures in his or her professional practices include, as a minimum, requirements for:
 - handwashing
 - use of protective barriers, where appropriate
 - cleaning and/or sterilization of equipment and facilities
 - managing wastes, including sharps

4. Ensuring that appropriate infection control prevention policies to promote the use of the infection control measures in his or her practice are developed and implemented.
5. Ensuring that processes to update his or her infection control measures and policies are established based on considerations including:
 - relevant changing environmental risk factors for infection and transmission
 - evolving knowledge
 - trends in practice
6. Applying his or her knowledge, skills and judgment to conduct ongoing assessments of the degree of current risks of infection and transmission to patients, staff, colleagues and other health professionals based on considerations including:
 - the assessments or treatment interventions planned or conducted
 - the health conditions of patients being assessed or treated
 - the degree of infection risk currently present in the internal practice environment
 - the degree of infection risk currently present in the external practice environment
 - current best practice in infection control protocols relevant to his or her professional practice
 - the health and immunization status of people in the practice environment including him/herself, colleagues and patients
7. Incorporating contact management protocols into his or her infection control measures when his or her risk assessment process supports it. This may include managing the interactions between patients, staff, colleagues and other health professionals.
8. Ensuring that adequate resources are available to support appropriate infection control measures.
9. Educating patients, staff, colleagues and other health professionals about the need for infection control and the minimum requirements for it.
10. Advocating for best practice in infection control to owners and operators of physiotherapy practices and to administrative staff in positions of decision-making authority.
11. Fostering awareness of immunization recommendations for common and/or easily preventable illnesses for patients, staff, colleagues and other health professionals, where appropriate.

Definitions

Infection control: Measures practiced by healthcare personnel intended to prevent spread, transmission and acquisition of infectious agents or pathogens between patients, from healthcare workers to patients, and from patients to healthcare workers in the healthcare setting. As a minimum, these measures include proper hand hygiene, appropriate work practices, and use of personal protective equipment where required. Infection control measures instituted are based on how an infectious agent is transmitted and include standard, contact, droplet, and airborne precautions.

Internal practice environment: The physical location(s) where physiotherapy services are provided to patients. These physical locations can include hospitals, private practice premises, long-term care facilities and patients' homes in which physiotherapy services are provided.

External practice environment: The community in which the physiotherapist's internal practice environment exists. The external practice environment is any locale beyond the internal practice environment and may extend to municipal, provincial, national, or international borders depending on the nature of the infection risk being considered.

Annotated List of Resources on Infection Control

As noted above, the literature on what is considered to be appropriate practice related to infection control measures continually evolves. As such rather than provide registrants with practice information that will be outdated as soon as it is published in a College standard, the College is offering the following annotated list of infection control resources. While this list is in no way complete, the use of resources such as these will ensure that registrants' infection control practice reflects the current evolving environment. Please note that the website addresses are to the organizations rather than individual documents.

1. Community and Hospital Infection Control Association (CHICA). CHICA is Canada's association of infection control professionals. It's goal is to prevent infections and improve patient care and staff health in hospitals, other health care facilities, and the community. It undertakes this by:
 - initiating and coordinating effective communication and cooperation among all disciplines united by infection control activities
 - supporting and/or developing effective and rational infection control practices
 - standardizing infection control practices
 - promoting research in areas related to infection control
 - promoting and facilitating infection control education for both infection control practitioners and other personnel working in hospitals, nursing homes and related institutions

CHICA's website provides an extremely useful set of links and resources on infection control matters. In particular, its resources on antibiotic-resistant organisms, hand hygiene and medical gels will be useful to many physiotherapists. Its links to an extensive list of evidence based guidelines on infection control issues will also be very useful to physiotherapists who wish to establish appropriate infection control practices. See <http://www.chica.org/> for more information.

2. The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) is CHICA's counterpart in the U.S. It has a similar mandate and it is also heavily involved in promoting knowledge of appropriate infection control practices through education, research, collaboration, public policy, practice guidance and credentialing.

APIC's website, which contains a wide variety in infection control related materials such as position statements, standards, and guidelines is another valuable resource for physiotherapists wishing to incorporate appropriate infection control practices into their activities. See <http://www.apic.org> for more information.

3. Public Health Agency of Canada. The Government of Canada's Public Health Agency is an important resource on infection control and other public health matters for all health professionals. The Agency's focus is increasing the effectiveness of efforts to prevent chronic diseases, like cancer and heart disease, prevent injuries and respond to public health emergencies and infectious disease outbreaks.

The Agency's website collects a number of important infection control resources into one easily accessible place. Among the useful tools available are the following:

- The Infectious Diseases section which provides current information on a wide variety of infectious diseases in both Canada and elsewhere in the world.
- The Advisories/Warning section which provides current updates on the status of a number of diseases.
- The Canada Communicable Disease Report (CCDR). Visitors can sign up to receive e-mail updates on the CCDR or review past issues of the CCDR online. The posted issues include important publications such as:
 - Supplement: HandWashing, Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization in Health Care, December 1998;
 - Supplement - Infection Control Guidelines. July 1999

See http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html for more information

4. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term-Care. The MOHLTC is the branch of Ontario's government that is responsible for health in the province. The MOHLTC website is another useful resource for health professionals who need to keep abreast of infection control matters. The sections of the website that are most relevant in this context are the Patient Safety resources and Health Bulletins area. These sections contain information in areas such as:
 - Diseases that are currently a matter of concern (e.g. Clostridium difficile, SARS)
 - Hand hygiene
 - Reports of the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee including Best Practice Manuals, Fact Sheets and important health notices (now available on Public Health Ontario website www.oahpp.ca.)
 - important health updates

See <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/index.html> for more information.

5. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States is another very valuable resource for health professionals interested in infection control matters. The CDC website contains two sections that are particularly relevant in this context:
 - The first is the section for Healthcare Providers.
 - The second is the section for Public Health Professionals

Both of these sections reference a wide variety of different guidelines and fact sheets pertinent to infection control matters. One that is very useful for practitioners wishing to incorporate appropriate infection controls into their practices is Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities. See <http://www.cdc.gov/about/> for more information.

References

Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada. July 2004

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