

Pandemic Influenza - Key Considerations for Physiotherapists

Introduction

Pandemic influenza is a worldwide concern. While the timing and location of a pandemic influenza outbreak is difficult to predict, the reality is that research at the level of the World Health Organization demonstrates that pandemic planning must be considered an imperative health issue by governments, health systems, health providers and consumers.

In response, Canada and in turn the provinces, including Ontario, have developed detailed and specific responses to the pandemic influenza threat. These plans, which are updated at least annually, require local and regional planning for an event that while random in nature, may have devastating consequences when and if it does occur.

In essence, Ontario's pandemic plan provides leadership to provincial organizations and local planners and providers. The College, as well as individual physiotherapists, have a role to play.

Background

The College has two significant and different responsibilities in pandemic planning. The first is to execute its regulatory function and administrative operations in unusual times. The second is to act as an information conduit to registrants.

With regard to the latter, the role of the College will be to ensure appropriate knowledge dissemination and systems level support to physiotherapists in their individual roles and responsibilities.

Health care providers, such as physiotherapists, have certain obligations within the provision of care in such emergency circumstances. Understanding the broader environment, translating this to individual practices, and ensuring patient safety are key professional responsibilities in place at all times.

Physiotherapists possess an array of skill sets available in the execution of local pandemic plans. 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 practise in any category of registration should undertake to consider the following key issues in relation to their professional role and responsibilities:

- To be informed regarding provincial (Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan) and local plans for a pandemic, particularly the role of one's particular profession 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 an influenza 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 (e.g. intubation)
- To comply with government directives as announced pre, during and post pandemic

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The information contained in this position statement may be time limited. Persons referring to this information more than two years from the date of publication should contact the College to confirm that the information is current.