

# Ethical Issues: Volume 1: Perspectives for the Physiotherapists

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## Referring doctors' perspectives about Physiotherapy management for chronic musculoskeletal pain

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Patients diagnosed with chronic disabling musculoskeletal pain have better health outcomes and higher levels of satisfaction with Physiotherapy management. A pilot study conducted by the authors found that doctor's referral to Physiotherapy treatment could have affected the satisfaction of the patients towards Physiotherapy management.

**Objectives:** The aim of the current study was to look into the perspectives of referring doctors (physicians and surgeons) towards Physiotherapy as reported by the patients. Secondly, it was of interest to see how the treatment strategies by the Physiotherapist affect patient satisfaction.

**Methods:** The study was conducted at the orthopedic pain center in the Physiotherapy department at a tertiary care hospital in Mumbai, India. Personal interviews were conducted with 193 patients using a valid questionnaire.

**Results:** The average age of the subjects was 47.5 years. Average duration of pain was close to 8 years, with low back pain being the most common location of pain. Majority of the patients were not referred for any particular Physiotherapy treatment (37.32%). Almost an equal percentage of subjects (33.16%) were referred for both exercise and electrotherapy treatments to the Physiotherapy department. Most of the times (around 68%), there was agreement in the treatment modes suggested by the referring doctor and the attending physiotherapist. However, in about 32% of the patients referred, there seemed to be a mismatch.

**Conclusion:** The referring doctors (physicians/surgeons) gave considerable freedom to the physiotherapists regarding the treatment of chronic musculoskeletal pain. Some of them seemed to recommend electrotherapy as a treatment mode, due to which, there was dissatisfaction amongst patients about the treatment methodologies recommended by the physiotherapist.

**Keywords:** Referral, physiotherapy, chronic musculoskeletal pain, perspectives

### INTRODUCTION

Patient treatment is affected to a large extent by the relationship that the attending physician has with the patient. In order to ensure adherence to the prescribed treatment, follow-up of treatment at home and the overall satisfaction of the patient towards treatments suggested, it is very important that the patient "trusts" the physician and his team. A review was done by Hillen et al in

2011[1] to look into the level of trust (cancer) patients had in their physicians. It was found that the level of trust in their physicians was very high, leading to strong willingness to adhere to the suggested treatments, better follow-up and more patient satisfaction [1]. Regular visits to the physicians help in building a tremendous level of trust in the patients and the patients are more willing to adhere to the prescription guidelines suggested by the physician.

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