

## **Physical Therapy: A Historical Perspective**

By: Nate Dixon, D.P.T.

Physical therapists are healthcare professionals who have historically adapted to meet the conservative healthcare needs of our nation and around the world. Physical therapy here in the USA has a strong tradition with many wonderful leaders. Florence Kendall, PT, is one of those leaders who is still going strong at 91 years of age! I had the good fortune of attending one of her lectures in 1996 in Hawaii where I was attending school and she helped to give me a remarkable historical perspective on the physical therapy profession.

In the early 1900's, physical therapists were called "reconstruction aids" as the rehab professionals of World War I. Physical therapy responded to the polio epidemic and WWII with a huge growth of the profession in the 1940's and 1950's. Since then, physical therapy has continued to adapt and meet the healthcare challenges of the public with growth, higher educational standards, and a commitment to excellence. Physical therapy has grown in all clinical areas: acute-care hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, skilled-nursing facilities, school systems, home health therapy, sports medicine, and outpatient clinics.

Physical therapy is a conservative, and a very cost-effective approach in delivering healthcare. Many physicians, dentists, chiropractors, and other healthcare professionals refer to and utilize PT services; however, there are some providers who don't understand or just simply forget what physical therapists can provide for clients.

Physical therapists first do a thorough physical therapy evaluation in conjunction with the knowledge learned of the medical, dental, or chiropractic diagnosis and other pertinent diagnostic imaging (radiographs, MRI, or CAT scans) and/or lab results. Communication back to the referring physician is then reciprocated by the physical therapists.

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants provide "hands-on" instruction of appropriate exercises to specifically strengthen weak muscles and stretch tight soft-tissue with appropriate techniques. Neurological re-education training helps to improve balance and safety when walking. Electrotherapeutic stimulation helps to strengthen muscles, reduce swelling/inflammation, decrease muscle spasms and pain, and improve wound healing. Ultrasound therapy can also be used for wound healing and it is an excellent modality for improving the body's natural ability to heal itself. Joint mobilization therapy, spinal traction, massage therapy, whirlpool therapy, compression therapy, moist-heat, and cold therapy are some of the other modalities a physical therapist can utilize to enhance healing.

A very important part of the care provided by a physical therapist and physical therapist assistant is patient education, which helps to decrease the stress of the impairment, and reassures a normal rehabilitation. Many times there is a causative factor that a physical therapist can help uncover and give several recommendations to modify or fix the root problem. The plan of care is developed with consideration of the individual's social and work setting environment to allow for the best outcome.

If a person chooses to see a physical therapist directly before going to see a physician then they need to know that most insurance plans currently require a physician's referral in order to obtain coverage for physical therapy services. Individuals who prefer to pay privately do not require a physician's referral. With or without insurance, individuals can always call Palmetto Therapy Services (843-842-3222) and schedule a FREE screen to determine if physical therapy is their best first selection.

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