

**SUPPORT
WORKERS**
as an
INTEGRAL PART
of the
**PHYSIOTHERAPY
WORKFORCE**

A policy briefing from the CSP

Purpose of this briefing

The purpose of this briefing is to inform members and staff of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) of the CSP policy position and asks on physiotherapy support workers. This is to underpin the work they undertake as they engage with and influence workforce planning and the development of support workers as part of the physiotherapy workforce. It sets out what the CSP believes needs to happen for the physiotherapy support worker workforce to fulfil its potential. It applies to all parts of the United Kingdom and Crown Dependencies (*referred to as the UK throughout the document*).

UK Context

Currently the non-registered physiotherapy workforce in the UK is believed to be around 15% of the whole physiotherapy workforce.

Significant disparities exist across the UK in the availability of formal development routes for physiotherapy support workers.

England, Scotland and Wales have developed career or learning development frameworks for clinical healthcare support workers. However, access to the formal learning and development opportunities associated with these is inconsistent within and between countries, and there is no formal framework for Northern Ireland.

The lack of consistency of roles and expectations of individuals in those roles impacts on the development of new roles; the development of roles at higher levels and equitable career development opportunities for support workers. This causes confusion for employers and precludes best use of the physiotherapy workforce to optimise care.

CSP position for optimising the contribution of support workers to the profession

1 A significant increase in physiotherapy support workers is needed to fulfil population, patient and service delivery needs in safe, effective ways

A workforce focussed on prevention and rehabilitation is needed to meet the needs of an ageing and increasingly complex population.

Current rehabilitation services are over-stretched, and need to be expanded to meet current and future need and manage demand on other parts of the health and care system.

This relies on the growth and development of the physiotherapy workforce at all levels of practice.

Within the context of an overall expansion of the registered physiotherapy workforce, there needs to be an expansion of the number of non-registered staff as a proportion of the overall workforce. This is the only way to meet increased demand and improve access to rehabilitation services.

For change to be effective registered physiotherapists need to have sufficient capacity to ensure delegation practices are safe.

This will become an increasingly important issue as experienced physiotherapy support workers retire. CSP data shows that approximately 24% of the current physiotherapy support worker workforce are over 55 years of age.

Actions for health workforce planners:

- establish a target to increase physiotherapy support workers to be more in line with nursing (35% of the overall nursing workforce)
- ensure that the growth in numbers of physiotherapy support workers is accompanied by sufficient growth in the registered physiotherapy workforce to provide safe and effective delegation of tasks/responsibilities <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/supervision-accountability-and-delegation-activities-support-workers-guide-registered>

Actions for CSP members:

- read the CSP Future Workforce policy statement <https://www.csp.org.uk/documents/future-shape-physiotherapy-workforce-position-statement>
- read the CSP guidance on delegation <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/supervision-accountability-and-delegation-activities-support-workers-guide-registered>
- submit examples of where support worker roles have been essential to service improvement in the CSP innovations database <https://www.csp.org.uk/professional-clinical/improvement-and-innovation/innovations-database>

Actions for rehabilitation managers and leaders:

- while this shift take place, keep patient care under careful review
- submit examples of where support worker roles have been essential to service improvement in the CSP innovations database <https://www.csp.org.uk/professional-clinical/improvement-and-innovation/innovations-database>

2 We need increased data to demonstrate the size, growth and impact of the physiotherapy support worker workforce on service delivery and patient care

There are significant limitations with the current data for the physiotherapy and AHP support worker workforce.

Government bodies responsible for health workforce data in each UK country will need to take action to address this in order to establish a robust baseline and appropriate target growth of physiotherapy support workers. Staffing data will need to capture the full support worker workforce, and make it possible to identify those support workers undertaking delegated physiotherapy tasks and responsibilities.

Actions for health workforce data leads:

- establish a base line of numbers of support workers within the health and social care system undertaking delegated physiotherapy tasks and responsibilities

Action for health workforce planners and employers:

- establish targets for increasing the physiotherapy support worker workforce in step with increasing registered physiotherapy posts and in line with nursing support worker levels

Action by physiotherapy managers and clinical leads:

- ensure data is collected that captures how support workers are deployed and the impact of this
- ensure clear processes and resource to capture accurate and timely support worker workforce data and their impact.

3 The number of support workers required and the level they work at should be determined by patient and service need in the local context

Because of changing patient need and new ways of working, traditional approaches to physiotherapy workforce modelling where staff resource and skill mix are calculated on numbers of referrals alone are outdated.

Skill mix should be determined at the level of the local population and services, where needs are matched to the right skill set at the appropriate practice level and in ways that optimise the capability and scope of the entire workforce.

If workforce modelling is approached in this way, accompanied by a better understanding of the capability and scope of practice of support workers, new support worker roles should emerge at a range of levels.

Action for physiotherapy managers and clinical leads:

- use the CSP Optimising Capability resource to understand the full scope of support worker roles at various levels and in order to support matching levels of practice to patient and population need. (LINK)



We need an increase in support workers with enhanced levels of responsibility, working within robust governance arrangements

In recent years there has been a trend in support workers delivering greater levels of hands on patient care, providing one to one support, running group exercise classes and having a greater role in education and advice for patients and carers. This trend needs to continue to meet the rehabilitation needs of the population.

Most CSP members (80% in a 2019 survey) agree that an increase in delegation to support workers under robust governance arrangements supports the ambitions for the physiotherapy workforce in the context of transforming services and meeting population need.

There is a particular need to increase the numbers of support workers with the capabilities required for higher level support worker roles. As well as operating at a greater level of independence, higher level support workers will also be important in supporting learners in practice as appropriate to their role.

There should be sufficient Continued Professional Development (CPD) resource made available to enable support workers to develop these new skills. Increased opportunities for training and development will be required to address the loss of experience due to high numbers of support workers who will be retiring in the next decade.

To assure quality and safety of care, increased levels of delegation from registered physiotherapists needs to be in line with CSP principles.

It is also essential that there is sufficient capacity in the registered workforce to support and supervise higher level support workers, and training in safe and effective delegation.

Action for CSP members:

- read and implement CSP guidance on Principles for assuring the provision of safe, high, quality physiotherapy interventions in the context of delegation of support workers. (LINK)
- read the guidance on job planning <https://www.csp.org.uk/documents/job-planning-tool-support-safe-and-effective-care>

Action for physiotherapy managers:

- make the case for an increase in higher level support worker roles
- consider how higher level support worker roles are improving workforce productivity <https://innovations.csp.org.uk/>
- create opportunities for support workers to develop into these roles
- submit examples of higher level support workers roles making an impact on workforce productivity or patient outcomes and experience to the CSP innovations database.

5 The CSP guidelines for optimising physiotherapy support worker capability, role, scope, and career development should be used alongside existing country frameworks to increase consistency in capability requirements and role development

Currently there is a lack of consistency in how different levels of support worker practice are defined across the UK and the level of education required for similar roles.

This makes it difficult for the contribution of support worker roles, as an integral part of the physiotherapy workforce to be understood, valued and recognised. It also makes it harder for physiotherapy support workers to move from one support worker post to another, or to progress to higher levels of practice.

CSP insight from 2019 shows these inconsistencies prevail in the perception from support workers that their current duties and responsibilities are not reflected in their job description and their banding/remuneration level.

61% of surveyed support workers reported their current level banding was not reflected in the duties and responsibilities they were asked to undertake and 61% also reported that their current job description was not accurate or only partially reflected their role.

Most importantly it makes it difficult for practitioners and employers to be assured of the capability required to perform at a higher support worker level, with implications for quality of care.

Action for physiotherapy managers and leaders:

- use the CSP resource, *Optimising Capability in the Physiotherapy Support Worker Workforce* when developing roles and staff ([LINK](#))

Action for policy makers:

- work with the CSP and other professional bodies to further develop the CSP guidance for adoption for AHP and rehabilitation support workers.

6

There needs to be clear opportunities and pathways for support workers to develop capabilities and pursue professional and career development

Each UK country should have a programme of work to develop support worker roles including those at a higher level.

This should both develop the CDP opportunities, at the same time of achieving greater consistency in level of practice, capabilities and governance arrangements.

UK wide this would have an impact on:

- developing support workers to undertake a higher level of practice
- developing opportunities for support workers to deliver a broader range of practice skills e.g. supporting the development of learners in practice and motivating behaviour change in patients
- widening participation to development as a support worker and as a supply route to registered practice
- standardising support worker roles.

CPD for support workers should be developed in line with the [CPD Principles](https://www.csp.org.uk/news/2019-01-18-new-continuing-professional-development-principles-physiotherapists-support-workers) co-designed by 20 professional bodies, including the CSP, in January 2019. <https://www.csp.org.uk/news/2019-01-18-new-continuing-professional-development-principles-physiotherapists-support-workers>

Support workers frequently spend the most face to face time with patients and are therefore in a key position to influence self-management, and the behaviour change necessary to support patients to do this. Their potential contribution to the learning and development of others within the scope of their roles is a key enabler in increasing practice based learning capacity.

In improving access of physiotherapy support workers to CPD therefore, key learning and development in exercise prescription, in coaching/motivational interviewing and supporting the learning and development of others should be prioritised.

It also requires an approach to funding CPD for the non-registered workforce that is inclusive and avoids the risk of under-developing the AHP support worker workforce as an unintended consequence of nursing support worker development.

Physiotherapy support workers need equal access to ongoing CPD in order to maintain and/or extend their competence and practice. This should be provided through the most appropriate route for the service and individual, with continuing assessment of capability and competence undertaken by a registered physiotherapist or an appropriately skilled higher level support worker.

Action for policy makers:

- work with the CSP and other AHP professional bodies to develop a programme of work to develop support worker roles including those at a higher level
- make sure CPD funds are accessible to support workers – including the Individual Learning Budgets announced for clinicians in England in 2019

Actions for physiotherapy managers and leaders:

- encourage and facilitate support workers to take up CPD opportunities;
- make the case for training to be made available; read the CPD principles co-developed by 20 professional bodies including the CSP

Actions for employers:

- utilise alternative development routes including apprenticeships where available
- consider the learning and development needs of the entire support workforce AHPs make up a third of the workforce and are capable of making a considerable contribution at all levels to the transformation of care

Actions for physiotherapy support workers:

- have discussions with your line manager about your learning and development needs and aspirations in order to both optimise your capability in your role and progress in your career.

The CSP does not currently support the need for statutory regulation for support workers. At this time the CSP does not wish to pursue this for the physiotherapy support worker workforce, for the following reasons:

- patient safety is currently achieved through a number of means e.g. adhering to principles of good delegation and rigorous governance arrangements, and not just statutory regulation
- it is the wrong way to get recognition. This should rather be achieved through an established capability framework and demonstration of meeting levels of capability
- it would be costly – to individuals and the system.

Action for the CSP:

- keep this policy under review.



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THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 59,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.