Patient-Physical Therapist Collaboration in Goal Setting in the Outpatient Setting

Alice Salzman, PT, EdD; Jessica Dobbe, DPT; Ashley Flament, DPT; Kathryn Ruzicka, DPT; Larissa Weresczak, DPT; Marjorie Johnson Hilliard, PT, EdD

Department of Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois

**INTRODUCTION**

- Researchers have noted a need for health professionals to involve patients in their healthcare decisions.
- Informed shared decision-making (ISDM) occurs during meetings between patients with expertise in the experience of illness/disability and medical professionals with expertise in movement problems and pathologies.
- Goal setting using ISDM fosters high quality care and achievement of outcomes.

**PURPOSE**

To explore ISDM between physical therapists (PTs) and patients in outpatient settings, particularly during goal setting.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How do PTs facilitate the goal setting aspect of ISDM during the episode of care?
- How do patients facilitate the goal setting aspect of ISDM during the episode of care?
- How do PTs develop the ability to involve patients in the process of goal setting?

**METHODS**

- Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded.
- To enhance trustworthiness of the results, three investigators coded each transcript and created concept maps for each PT-patient pair.
- Cross-case analysis occurred during several researcher discussions to identify recurring ideas and resulted in a final, overall concept map.
- Recurring ideas were linked into patterns within the final concept map; the patterns were examined to form themes.

**PARTICIPANTS**

- Six PT-patient pairs from four outpatient settings
- Physical therapists
  - ≥ 5 years of clinical experience
  - 4 men, 2 women
  - 29 - 61 years of age
- Patients
  - 3 men, 3 women
  - 25 - 77 years of age

**RESULTS**

- ISDM for Goal Setting
  - Effective Communication
    - Establishing rapport
      - Supports
        - Active listening
          - Leads to
            - Patient's factors
              - Preference
                - Includes
                  - Active engagement in goal setting
  - Revising goals
    - Leads to
      - Mutual understanding
        - Leads to
          - Mutual respect
            - Leads to
              - Realistic expectations
                - Leads to
                  - Patient's interest
                    - In their health and wellness
                      - Includes
                        - Personal component
                          - Leads to
                            - Educating the patient
                              - Leads to
                                - Their recovery process
                                  - Includes
                                    - Realistic expectations
                                      - Leads to
                                        - Active engagement in goal setting

**THEMES**

- Effective communication between PTs and patients includes establishing rapport, active listening, and asking probing questions. These elements plus PT adaptability foster a relationship that promotes collaborative goal setting.

  [Regarding influential factors for goal setting] “I think establishing rapport. I think that if you can get that good relationship started from the beginning and continue to have a great rapport with the patient throughout their treatment, I think ultimately that influences good outcomes.” (Physical Therapist 1)

  “It’s not about me or what my expectations are for them. It’s what their world is and what’s important to them.” (Physical Therapist 4)

- A comfortable PT-patient relationship includes mutual respect and understanding, promotes the development of trust and leads to setting realistic expectations together.

  “I like to have open communication with respect and honesty. I like patients to trust me and feel like they can tell me whatever is going on.” (Physical Therapist 2)

  “Patients are looking for trust, they are looking for an educated answer. I think as long as you can provide that to them and show them that you are open to them and that you are listening to their complaints, I think that goes a long way to developing that relationship.” (Physical Therapist 6)

  “I think honesty is the biggest one in goal setting. Don’t tell people what you think they want to hear.” (Patient 6)

- Patients’ interest in their health and wellness enhances their active engagement in the goal setting process.

  “They have opportunities to share with me their ability to function on activities that are important in their life, and then I take that information, we establish goals for that, and then we design treatment to try to reach those goals.” (Physical Therapist 4)

  “The more you engage the patient in their treatment, the better your results are. It’s just a flat out fact.” (Physical Therapist 5)

**DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION**

- ISDM requires effective communication within a comfortable environment.
- Patients facilitate the process of ISDM by being open and honest about their functional needs. Interest in their health and wellness influences active engagement in their care.
- PTs utilize active listening to facilitate the goal setting process. Asking direct questions allows for reassessment of patient progress and modification of goals.
- PTs describe how the process they use for goal-setting has developed through interactions with patients.
- Further research can explore factors that influence patients’ interest in participating in their care, the processes PTs use to establish rapport, and ways PTs use active listening to develop effective partnerships.

**CLINICAL RELEVANCE**

- Collaboration in goal-setting requires PTs to invite patients to participate in decision-making and in forming patient specific goals. Involving patients in decision making increases satisfaction in their care and treatment adherence.