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Canadian
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MEDIA RELEASE
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International Policy Summit Reaches Consensus: PATIENT SELF-REFERRAL TO PHYSIOTHERAPY IMPROVES PUBLIC HEALTH

October 26, 2009 – Today in Washington, DC, physiotherapists from around the world heard that direct patient access and self-referral to physiotherapy improves public health. Patient self-referral and direct access is proven to be safe, and results in better health outcomes, more timely care, higher patient satisfaction, and lower costs.

Leaders from 18 countries attending the International Policy Summit on Direct Access and Advanced Scope of Practice in Physical Therapy endorsed the results of research that clearly demonstrate that patient self-referral to physiotherapy is best for all health systems, whether public or private. Direct access and self-referral allows patients to access physiotherapy as their first choice for rehabilitation. A physician referral is not required.

Marilyn Moffat, PT, PhD, CSCS, FAPTA, President of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, says “Physical therapists are able to act as first contact practitioners, and patients may seek direct services without referral from another health care professional. The results of this wide body of research are clear: patients benefit from self-referral and direct access. We encourage legislators and health administrators around the world to consider these findings.”

“Canada has been a world leader in legislating direct access so that patients can self-refer to physiotherapy”, says Alice Aiken, PT, PhD, President of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. “Patient self-referral is legal in all provinces of Canada”.

As co-host of the policy summit with the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) and the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) contributed evidence and key learnings to the summit deliberations. “We were able to share our successes”, says Dr. Aiken, “and also point out problems with allowing third-party payers like insurance companies to continue to insist upon a physician referral to physiotherapy, even though it is not legally required and can delay the treatment process for patients who need physiotherapy.”

Access is an advocacy priority for the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. Through active participation on national initiatives and partnerships with other health organizations and physiotherapy stakeholders, CPA will strive to promote effective health human resources planning and innovative primary health models of service delivery to ensure that all Canadians have appropriate access to needed health services.¹ All Canadians deserve timely and reliable access to physiotherapy services regardless of venue.¹

Early access to physiotherapy plays an important role in chronic disease prevention and control, keeping Canadians active and independent at work or returning to work and out of hospitals and long-term care facilities.^{2,3}

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3 Pinnington, M.A., Miller, J., Stanley, I. (2004) An evaluation of prompt access to physiotherapy in the management of low back pain in primary care. Family Practice, 21 (4):472-480.