

MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Canadians in rural and remote areas not getting proper arthritis care and treatment: Physiotherapists take on extended roles and responsibilities

Toronto, September 18, 2008 – September is Arthritis Awareness Month and the Ontario and Canadian Physiotherapy Associations are taking this opportunity to highlight some of the serious concerns facing people with arthritis. The Arthritis Society says approximately 4.5 million Canadians have arthritis. As the baby boomer population ages, one million more per decade will be diagnosed with the debilitating disease. Yet despite this disturbing scenario, many communities do not have adequate access to the health professionals that can help treat, prevent or slow the progression of arthritis.

Many communities, especially those in rural and remote areas, do not have adequate access to health services. First Nations communities in Canada are particularly at risk if arthritis services are not improved. “Canadian aboriginal people have a higher prevalence of arthritis. Nineteen percent have arthritis compared to about 16 percent of non-Aboriginals,” says Linda Li, a physiotherapist and arthritis researcher at the University of British Columbia and Arthritis Research Centre of Canada. “Aboriginal people also report higher levels of disability from arthritis than non-aboriginals. Access to ongoing, comprehensive care is absolutely essential for them.”

Physiotherapists are health professionals skilled in the assessment and treatment of arthritis from the first onset of symptoms to the management of chronic disability. Physiotherapy treatment is tailored to the individual’s symptoms, needs and lifestyle. Using exercise, education and a variety of therapeutic modalities as needed, physiotherapists work with their clients to help them:

- Regain muscle balance and flexibility
- Improve circulation and endurance
- Improve strength and stability
- Improve poor posture; and
- Maintain or increase mobility

One of the ways to improve access to Canadians with arthritis and decrease the burden on the health care system is to have physiotherapists take on extended roles and responsibilities in keeping with their skills and abilities. While they cannot replace rheumatologists, they can work in a valuable triage capacity and also provide ongoing monitoring of patients with stable conditions.

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) supports expanding roles for physiotherapists. “It’s clear that with the challenges the health care system is facing the demand for arthritis care services is going to outweigh the supply,” says Michael Brennan, CEO of CPA. “We need to plan for new and innovative methods of delivering these vital health care services and the better utilization of physiotherapists are certainly one way to accomplish this.”

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association is calling on health professionals, academic institutions, regulatory bodies, and policy makers to support the roles of physiotherapists in the health care continuum as a way of improving arthritis care to those Canadians who need it the most. CPA looks forward to dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders in moving forward with solutions that benefit the health of all Canadians.

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