Secondary School Students' Knowledge of Physical Therapy: The Trinidadian Scenario

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *Research in regions outside of the Caribbean shows that high school and college students' knowledge of physical therapy is lacking. There are no data reported to date for students in the Caribbean region. This study sought to evaluate Trinidadian secondary school students' knowledge of physical therapy, identify sources of knowledge and examine the relationship between knowledge and selected factors.*

Methods: *A non-experimental cross-sectional analysis of relationships was conducted with 1427 students attending schools that were randomly selected from rural and urban locations in Trinidad. A questionnaire which required the students to identify selected tasks performed by physical therapists, grade the skill level associated with each task and identify sources of information was utilized.*

Results: *A total of 1353 questionnaires were returned, of which 1236 were eligible for analysis. The mean number of correct responses regarding knowledge of tasks conducted by a physical therapist was 6.47 ± 2.05 out of a total of 11. More than 50% of the respondents had incorrect responses for questions related to the skill level associated with each task. Seniors and students who were interested in health careers had significantly higher scores for knowledge of tasks performed by physical therapists (6.72 ± 1.94; 6.7 ± 1.81) than juniors and those who were interested in non-health careers (6.4 ± 2.07; 6.52 ± 1.99). The two most common sources of information from all categories of respondents were television (74.8%) followed by internet (54.6%).*

Conclusion: *Students attending secondary schools in Trinidad are not well informed about physical therapy and strategies must be developed to address this.*

Keywords: Knowledge, physical therapy, secondary school students

Conocimiento de los Estudiantes de la Escuela Secundaria Acerca de la Terapia Física: El Escenario de Trinidad y Tobago

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: *La investigación en regiones fuera del Caribe muestra que tanto los estudiantes de secundaria como los de la universidad, carecen de conocimientos de terapia física. Hasta la fecha no se reportan datos en relación con los estudiantes en la región del Caribe. Este estudio buscó evaluar los conocimientos de terapia física en estudiantes de secundarias de Trinidad y Tobago, identificar las fuentes del conocimiento, y examinar la relación entre los conocimientos y determinados factores seleccionados.*

Métodos: *Se realizó un análisis transversal no experimental de relaciones con 1427 estudiantes que asisten a escuelas rurales y urbanas seleccionadas al azar en diversas localidades en Trinidad. Se utilizó un cuestionario que pedía a los estudiantes identificar determinadas tareas realizadas por terapeutas físicos, evaluar el nivel de habilidad asociado con cada tarea e identificar las fuentes de información.*

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Resultados: *Un total de 1353 cuestionarios fueron respondidos, de los cuales 1236 fueron elegibles para su análisis. El número de respuestas correctas sobre el conocimiento de tareas llevadas a cabo por un terapeuta físico fue de 6.47 ± 2.05 de un total de 11. Más del 50% de los encuestados tuvo respuestas incorrectas para las preguntas relacionadas con el nivel de habilidad asociado con cada tarea. Los estudiantes de los últimos años así como aquellos interesados en carreras de salud, tuvieron puntuaciones significativamente mayores sobre el conocimiento de las tareas realizadas por terapeutas físicos (6.72 ± 1.94; 6.7 ± 1.81) con respecto a los estudiantes de primeros años y aquellos que estaban interesados en carreras no relacionadas con la salud (6.4 ± 2.07; 6.52 ± 1.99). Las dos fuentes más comunes de información de todas las categorías de encuestados fueron la televisión (74.8%) seguida por la Internet (54.6%).*

Conclusión: *Los estudiantes que asisten a las escuelas secundarias de Trinidad no están bien informados acerca de la terapia física, y se deben desarrollar estrategias para solucionar este problema.*

Palabras claves: Conocimiento, terapia física, estudiantes de secundaria

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INTRODUCTION

Any profession possesses a range of specific knowledge and skills that are either unique, or more significantly developed than in other professions (1). These knowledge and skills are acquired over many years through a variety of means including formal or informal schooling and on the job experience. When an individual makes a career choice, therefore, it is intended to be a long standing decision and should be given much thought, consideration and careful planning. Individuals vary with regards to the time at which they make career choices. According to Super's developmental theory, individuals between the ages 15 and 24 years are at the exploration stage of their development. This phase is characterized by the making of tentative choices and skill development. Individuals at this point in their career development will seek to gather information and experiment through classes, work experience and hobbies. Developing and planning a tentative goal typically occurs between ages 14 and 18 years (2−4). In the English-speaking Caribbean, this represents the period between third and sixth form.

Physical therapy is an allied health profession which has evolved significantly over the years including in the Caribbean region. This is reflected in an increase in the number of applicants to the training programme in Jamaica. It has been noted, however, that even though the number of applicants is increasing, the majority of the candidates are quite unaware of what the profession entails when they are interviewed. Two studies conducted among high school students in the United States of America (USA) using the same instrument showed some improvement in the knowledge base between 1982 and 1999 (5, 6). The mean number of correct responses to questions about tasks performed by physical therapists obtained by the sample in 1982 was 6.2 ± 2.3 compared to 7.3 ± 2.0 in 1999.

The same instrument used in the USA was utilized in two non-vocational senior high schools in Ishikawa, Japan (7). The mean number of correct items on the knowledge section was found to be lower than that obtained in the USA (4.3 ± 3.3). In all three studies, the item that received the highest percentage of correct responses was "instructs a patient in exercise". The percentage of correct responses in Japan, however, was much lower (51%) compared to the 83% obtained by Tsuda *et al* (5) and the 91% obtained by Kallus *et al* (6). In the USA, the item that obtained the largest number of inaccurate responses was related to the task "provide wound care". In Japan, the least accurate response was obtained for the item "treats a client in an intensive therapy unit". Science and health career oriented students were more accurate in their responses than non-health career students in all three studies. The differences between Japan and the USA may be due to the types and location of the schools selected. Both studies conducted in the USA used public schools that were randomly selected from both rural and urban locations. The study in Japan used a sample of convenience consisting of two non-vocational schools selected from the same area.

With regard to sources of information, data from Japan showed that mass media was the leading source of information, with television being the leading source. This was different for the USA where "personal contacts" was identified as the most frequent source of information in both 1982 and 1999. As indicated by Ogiwara *et al* (7), the physical therapy service in the USA is better developed and more heavily utilized compared to Japan. This would explain why personal contact was a more frequent source of information in the American population.

The worldwide demand for physical therapists is projected to grow significantly in the next few years to meet the demands of ageing populations. In the USA, a 37% increase in employment of physical therapists is expected by 2018 (8). Data in Canada indicate that population growth is outstripping the growth in the number of physical therapists, thus indicating a growing demand for physical therapists in that country (9). Physical therapy training programmes must

focus on recruiting adequate numbers of candidates to meet this growing need.

The University of the West Indies is currently the only institution offering a degree in physical therapy in the English-speaking Caribbean. The majority of the applicants to the programme are from the Caribbean region and in order to develop effective marketing strategies, it is important to evaluate this target market. Data from other studies show an overall lack in students' knowledge of physical therapy, however, these data cannot be extrapolated to the Caribbean since the degree to which the profession is defined and publicized in all regions of the world is highly varied and access to information, resources and services is also variable in different populations. This study sought to determine the level of knowledge of secondary school students in Trinidad regarding physical therapy, identify sources of knowledge and factors that influence their knowledge base.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional non-experimental analysis of relationships was conducted after the proposal was reviewed by the University Hospital of the West Indies/University of the West Indies/Faculty of Medical Sciences Ethics Committee and given approval. Approval was also obtained from the Statistics and Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago.

Sample

A total of 49 high schools offering a full seven-year education programme were identified from the Ministry of Education database. Schools were stratified into rural and urban based on their location. Four schools from each location were randomly selected using Microsoft Excel. The targeted sample size for the study was 1572 students with equal representation from rural and urban schools. It was estimated that only 50% of persons selected would agree to participate and return the consent and assent forms in the allotted time. Therefore oversampling was done. The teachers were instructed to randomly select a total of 390 students from each school (by drawing names from a bag) with an equal number being selected from each form starting from third form through to upper six.

Procedure

After permission was granted from the respective bodies, letters were sent to the principals of the selected schools requesting their assistance in facilitating the study. Number coded questionnaires, consent forms and assent forms were delivered to the schools with instructions for administration. All students who returned the signed consent and assent forms within a week were included. The students from each form completed the questionnaire in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. The students were not allowed to discuss the questions with each other.

Instruments

A three-part closed questionnaire was used. The first part focussed on acquiring demographic information such as age, gender and current form level. The second part collected data on students' knowledge of the profession. One section required the students to identify tasks which are carried out by physical therapists, amongst which were two distracters. The other section required the participants to identify the skill level (low, medium, or high) associated with nine tasks. The third division of the questionnaire focussed on sources of information. Sources were itemized under three major categories: media, personal contacts and career information resources. The questions were taken from three previously conducted studies, therefore allowing for comparisons to be made with other regions (6−8).

Data analysis

Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS, version 12 for Windows). Descriptive statistics was used to describe the global knowledge base regarding physical therapy. The information regarding knowledge was analysed in two ways. First, the total number of accurate responses to the items on the questionnaire was calculated and the independent Student's *t*-test was done to determine whether there were differences in the mean number of correct responses between gender, academic level (students in forms three to five were grouped together as juniors and upper and lower six students were classified as seniors) and location of the school (rural or urban). Intended career was divided into health, non-health and undecided. An analysis of variance was used to determine whether there was a difference in the mean knowledge scores for these three categories.

The Chi-square test was used to assess whether there was a significant difference in proportion of correct and incorrect responses to each question on the instrument by gender, academic level, school location, intended career and sources of knowledge. All statistical analyses were done at an α level of 0.05.

RESULTS

Demographic data

A total of 1427 questionnaires were distributed amongst students in forms three through to upper six in six of the eight randomly selected schools. Two of the rural schools did not follow through with distribution. The total number of questionnaires returned was 1353, resulting in a return rate of 94.8%. Some questionnaires were not properly completed and the total number of questionnaires that were eligible for data analysis was 1236. There was missing data for one student for gender and for one student on career. The mean age of the students was 191.53 months ± 17.28 months.

Of the 1236 questionnaires, 376 respondents (30.4%) represented rural schools whilst 860 respondents (69.6%) represented urban schools. There were 649 male (52.5%)

and 586 (47.4%) female respondents. Eighty per cent of the sample was juniors and 20% seniors; 23.1% of respondents indicated an interest in pursuing a health career, 34.6% were undecided and 42.2% were interested in non-health careers.

Accuracy of knowledge

The total scores for knowledge of tasks performed by physical therapists ranged from 0 to 11 with four persons obtaining a perfect score. The mean number of correct responses for all students was 6.47 ± 2.05. The lowest mean scores were found amongst juniors, rural schools and those who were undecided regarding their intended career path, whilst the highest mean score was obtained by seniors and those who were interested in a health career (Table 1). The mean number of correct responses obtained by seniors was significantly higher than that obtained by juniors ($p = 0.03$) and those who were interested in pursuing a health career had a significantly higher number of correct responses than those who were undecided ($p = 0.01$).

Both seniors and juniors were most familiar with physical therapists providing "instruction on exercise" and "working with joints to decrease pain and stiffness" (Table 2; χ values not shown). The percentage of seniors with correct responses to these two questions, however, was significantly higher ($p = 0.025$; $p = 0.018$) than the percentage of juniors with correct responses. Students were least familiar with

Table 1: Mean number of correct responses to questions related to knowledge of tasks performed by physical therapists

Student sample		# of students	Mean # of correct responses	SD	Statistic	*p*
	Total sample	1236	6.47	2.046		
School location	Urban	860	6.49	1.99	t = -0.75	0.45
	Rural	376	6.40	2.16		
Gender	Males	649	6.48	2.01	t = 0.315	0.75
	Females	586	6.45	2.08		
Academic level	Juniors	989	6.4	2.07	t = -2.19	0.03
	Seniors	247	6.72	1.94		
Intended career path	Health	285	6.7	1.81	F = 4.57	0.01
	Non-health	522	6.52	1.99		
	Undecided	428	6.25	2.24		

Table 2: Percentage of participants with correct responses to each question related to knowledge of tasks performed by physical therapists

		School location		Gender		Academic level		Intended career path		
Items used to assess knowledge of tasks performed by physical therapists	**Total n = 1236**	**Urban n = 860**	**Rural n = 376**	**Male n = 649**	**Female n = 586**	**Junior n = 989**	**Senior n = 247**	**Health career n = 285**	**Non-health career n = 522**	**Undecided n = 428**
Instructs a client on exercise	81.8	82.1	81.1	82.1	81.4	80.7	86.2*	85.6	82.4	78.5
Gives massage	60.0	61.7	56.1	58.4	61.8	58.8	64.8	63.2	61.3	56.3
Plans a treatment programme	76.3	77.2	74.2	76.9	75.8	75.6	78.9	82.1*	76.8	72.0
Works with joints to decrease pain and stiffness	81.5	82.8	78.5	80.0	83*	80.3	86.2*	83.5*	83.9*	77.1
Applies heat treatment	42.4	43.6	39.6	41.6	43.3	42.7	41.3	44.6	41.6	42.1
Teaches daily living skills	44.6	43.6	46.8	49*	39.6	43.7	48.2	45.6	41.6	47.7
Treats a client in an intensive therapy unit	49.6	49.4	50.1	47.5	51.9	50.5	46.3	53.2	46.7	50.7
Gives emotional support to client/family	37.7	36.5	40.4	37.9	37.5	39	32.4	40	36.4	37.9
Assesses a client's need for treatment	65.2	65.5	64.6	65.3	65.4	63.8	71.1*	67.7	65.5	63.6
Assists in surgery	65.2	63.4	69.4*	66.3	64	64.5	68	64.6*	69.2*	60.7
Prescribes medication	41.7	43.1	38.6	43	40.4	40.1	48.2*	40	46.4*	37.1

* Significant findings on the Chi-squared test comparing the proportion of correct responses for different categories, $p < 0.05$

physical therapists "providing emotional support to the client or family members". A large percentage of the group inaccurately indicated "medication prescription" as the physical therapist's role; however, it was noted that a significantly larger proportion of seniors (48.2%) was accurate in their response to this question compared to the juniors (40.1%; $p = 0.01$). A significantly larger percentage of males (49%) correctly responded to the task "teaches daily living skills" compared to females (39.6%; $p = 0.002$).

The only significant difference between the responses of rural and urban students was related to a larger percentage of the rural students correctly identifying that physical therapists did not "assists in surgery". Students who were interested in health careers had significantly higher correct responses for the items "plans a treatment programme", "works with joints to decrease pain and stiffness" and "assists in surgery".

Sources of information

In the "personal contacts" category, 36.3% of students indicated "friend told me" as their source of information about the profession (Table 4). The largest percentage of respondents in the "media" category attributed their knowledge of physical therapy to "television" (74.8%) and "internet" [54.6%] (Table 5). "Teacher, counsellor, coach" was selected by 49.8% of the total sample as their source of information under the "career information resources" (Table 6).

The results of the Chi-square analysis (data not shown in the Tables) showed that a significantly larger percentage of the students who obtained their knowledge from their friends, were able to accurately identify that physical therapists "plan a treatment programme" ($p = 0.02$). It was observed, however, that a large percentage also had incorrect responses

Table 3: Percentage of participants with correct responses to each question on the level of skill associated with tasks performed by physical therapists

		School location		Gender		Academic level		Intended career path		
Tasks for which required skill level was rated	**Total** n = 1236	**Urban** n = 860	**Rural** n = 376	**Male** n = 649	**Female** n = 586	**Junior** n = 989	**Senior** n = 247	**Health career** n = 285	**Non-health career** n = 522	**Undecided** n = 428
Designs a patient's treatment programme	48.5	47.9	50	46.7	50.5	45.5	60.7*	55.4	46.4	46.5
Evaluates a patient's need for treatment	48.9	47.6	51.9	46.2	51.7	47	56.3*	55.1*	49.4	44.2
Gives emotional support to the patient and family	23.3	23.8	22.1	24.3	22	24.5	18.6	22.5	24.9	22
Instructs a patient in exercises	44.1	44.7	42.8	45.8	42.3	45.7*	37.7	41.4	45.4	44.2
Provides wound care	34.6	33.3	37.8	34.1	35.3	32.9	41.7	36.8	30.7	37.9
Works with joints to decrease pain and stiffness	31.2	33.6	25.9	33.9	28.4	31.3	31.2	29.5	31.6	32.1
Gives massages	35.8	34.9	37.8	37	34.5	36.5	32.8	33.7	38.1	34.3
Teaches daily living skills	37.9	38.7	35.9	37.1	38.7	37.8	38.1	37.2	38.9	37.1
Applies heat treatment	23.6	24.8	21	27.1*	19.8	24.1	21.9	22.8	24.1	23.6

* Significant findings on the Chi-squared test comparing the proportion of correct responses for the different categories, $p < 0.05$

Skill level

The percentage of respondents correctly identifying the skill level associated with selected tasks is shown in Table 3 (χ values not shown). A significantly higher percentage of seniors correctly identified the task "designs a patient's treatment programme" as a high skilled task compared to juniors (60.7% *vs* 45.5%; $p = 0.000$). "Evaluates a patient's need for treatment" was correctly identified as a high skilled task by 56.3% of seniors compared to 47% of juniors ($p = 0.01$). A larger percentage of juniors correctly identified that the task "instructs a patient in exercise" was a medium skill level compared to the seniors (45.7% *vs* 37.7%; $p = 0.03$).

for other aspects of physical therapy skills. A significantly larger proportion of those who obtained information from the "internet" ($p = 0.01$) and "teacher, counsellor, coach" ($p = 0.03$) had incorrect responses for the skill "applies heat treatment". The only other significant relationship was between "television" and the distracter "assists in surgery". Sixty-five per cent of those who had their knowledge from television correctly identified that physical therapists did not assist in surgery ($p = 0.02$).

Table 4: Percentage of respondents who gave affirmative responses to the personal contact options as a source of information

		School location		Gender		Academic level		Intended career path		
Personal contact sources	**Total**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Male**	**Female**	**Junior**	**Senior**	**Health career**	**Non-health career**	**Undecided**
	n = 1236	**n = 860**	**n = 376**	**n = 649**	**n = 586**	**n = 989**	**n = 247**	**n = 285**	**n = 522**	**n = 428**
Family member was a patient	26.5	27	25.3	27.1	25.8	26	28.3	27.7	27.6	24.3
Family member told me	25.5	25	26.6	25.3	24.6	26.3	22.3	27.4	25.9	23.8
Friend told me	36.3	37.4	33.8	35.6	37.2	37.4	32	32.3	30.9	40.7
Friend was a client	17.7	18.7	15.4	21.1*	14	17.3	19.4	16.1	17.6	18.9
I was a patient	8.5	9.8*	5.6	10.8*	6	8.9	6.9	7.7	8.4	9.1
My family physician told me	9	9.4	8	10.6	7.2	8.7	10.1	12.3	8.4	7.5
Family member is a therapist	9.8	10.1	9	11.4	8	11*	4.9	12.3	8.4	9.8
Friend is a therapist	8.9	9.2	8.2	11.9*	5.6	9.3	7.3	11.2	8.2	7.9
None	14.1	14.1	14.1	11.9	16.6	14.5	12.6	11.9	14.6	15

*Significant findings on the Chi-squared test comparing the proportion of affirmative responses for the different categories, $p < 0.05$

Table 5: Percentages of respondents who gave affirmative responses to the media as a source of information

		School location		Gender		Academic level		Intended career path		
Medial sources	**Total**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Male**	**Female**	**Junior**	**Senior**	**Health career**	**Non-health career**	**Undecided**
	n = 1236	**n = 860**	**n = 376**	**n = 649**	**n = 586**	**n = 989**	**n = 247**	**n = 285**	**n = 522**	**n = 428**
Television	74.8	76.4*	71	76.3	73	74.8	74.5	74.7	75.5	73.8
Internet	54.6	55.2	53.2	56.9	52.2	56.2*	48.2	60.7	51.9	54
Films	28.9	30	26.3	32.7	24.7	29.4	26.7	29.8	27.8	29.4
Newspaper/magazine	37.3	36	40.2	40.4	34	38.4	32.8	35.1	39.3	36.4
Book	34.6	35.1	33.5	35	34.3	36.1*	28.7	39.3	32	34.8
Advertisement	32.7	32.3	33.5	34.7	30.5	33.8	28.3	30.2	32.4	34.8
Radio	21.4	19.8	25.3*	23	19.8	24.3*	10.1	18.2	19.9	25.5*
None	4.9	5.2	4	6	3.6	5.3	3.2	2.8	5.7	5.1

* Significant findings on the Chi-squared test comparing the proportion of affirmative responses for the different categories, $p < 0.05$

Table 6: Percentages of respondents who gave affirmative responses to the career information resources as a source of information

		School location		Gender		Academic level		Intended career path		
Career information resources	**Total**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Male**	**Female**	**Junior**	**Senior**	**Health career**	**Non-health career**	**Undecided**
	n = 1236	**n = 860**	**n = 376**	**n = 649**	**n = 586**	**n = 989**	**n = 247**	**n = 285**	**n = 522**	**n = 428**
Teacher, counsellor, coach	49.8	52.8*	43.1	52.1	47.4	51.1	44.9	43.9	52.1	50.9
Career literature or pamphlet	19.7	19.2	21	17.9	21.8	17.8	27.5*	20.4	19.9	18.9
Career aptitude test	5	5.3	4.3	5.9	4.1	5.5	3.2	8.4*	3.8	4.2
Career day or health fair	26.6	24.7	31.1*	26.2	27	25.4	31.6	30.5	25.7	25
Visits to physical therapy schools/hospitals	12.4	14.4*	7.7	13.7	10.9	12.8	10.5	16.5	11.3	11
Volunteer or work experience	9.5	10.9*	6.4	10.8	8.2	9.7	8.9	9.8	8.8	10.3
None	16.9	16.6	17.8	16.7	17.1	17.3	15.5	16.5	15.4	19.2

* Significant findings on the Chi-squared test comparing the proportion of affirmative responses for the different categories, $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that high school students overall were not very knowledgeable about the various tasks performed by physical therapists, nor the skill level associated with these tasks. Seniors and students who were interested in health careers were a bit more knowledgeable than juniors and those who were interested in non-health careers. The two most common sources of information in this population were television and internet.

The mean number of accurate responses for all students in this study was almost identical to that reported by Tsuda *et al* (5) for the USA. The highest mean score was achieved by the health career groups in both studies. The seniors in both studies had significantly higher correct responses than juniors on the task "instructs a patient on exercise". These results are logical as high school seniors are much closer to active pursuit of a particular professional path and would therefore be pursuing information at a different level compared to juniors. Students interested in a health career had significantly higher correct responses for three of the items. This was not surprising since it was expected that these students may have been more actively researching career choices within the healthcare disciplines.

Fifty-eight per cent of all the respondents inaccurately thought that physical therapists "prescribe medications". This was comparable to the results obtained by Ogiwara *et al* (7) in Japan and Kallus *et al* (6) for the USA. In both studies, approximately half of their respondents also incorrectly identified "prescribing medications" as a task fulfilled by physical therapists. In contrast, the study by Tsuda *et al* (5) reported that only 24% of participants were inaccurate in their response to this question. By the end of the 1990s, bachelor's degrees in physical therapy were being replaced by doctoral degrees in the USA, and by 2000 anyone researching physical therapy on the internet would see that persons can be trained at doctoral levels. In healthcare, most people associate the term doctor with people who prescribe medications and this may have led to the misconception that physical therapists prescribe medications. In this study, over 50% of the students obtained their information from the internet and they would have seen reference to doctors of physical therapy.

Media have always been a powerful avenue for the general public to source information since its inception and this study was no exception, with television and internet leading the media sources. It was interesting to note, however, that the only factor significantly related to television as a source of information was the percentage of students who correctly identified that therapists did not assist in surgery. The study conducted by Tsuda *et al* (5) had significant relationships between television as a source and accuracy in identifying four of the physical therapy tasks. This is probably due to changes in the type of shows that are being viewed by today's students. There are many medical drama series today which clearly depict the team in the operating theatre as consisting primarily of the physicians and nurses and therefore students who watch these shows would quickly identify that physical therapists were not part of a surgical team. Most television shows that depict physical therapy are limited primarily to the role in exercise prescription.

With steady technological advancements, it is much easier for students to command intake of information from the palms of their hands. There is no need to sit behind a desktop computer or even a laptop, as mobile units are fully equipped to access the internet, tap into radio frequencies, and even transfer information between phones. It comes as no surprise therefore that 54.6% of respondents who gained information about the profession from the media attributed it to the use of the internet. It was of significant interest to note that even with this source of information there was still a high level of inaccurate responses. This is possibly due to inefficient use of the technology. Most students utilize internet based technology as a source of entertainment and not as an educational tool. The internet holds amazing potential for rapidly being able to educate large numbers of individuals about physical therapy; however, it is evident from this study that some focussed training sessions would be required with the students and teachers if the internet were to be used as a means of career guidance.

Guidance counsellors are expected to help students with career decisions and it was of concern therefore to note that many of the students who obtained information from teachers/guidance counsellors were inaccurate in their responses to many of the questions. This indicates a need for educational sessions to be conducted with the teachers and counsellors.

From the current study, it is quite clear that high school students in Trinidad are not very knowledgeable about tasks conducted by physical therapists and the level of skill associated with these tasks. Their current sources of information are providing a limited perspective and in some cases inaccurate perceptions of the profession and this can seriously compromise the numbers who chose to pursue physical therapy as a career. Career day was very low on the list of information sources and this indicates a need for physical therapists in Trinidad to become more actively involved in promoting the profession within the schools. Television and internet, though popular sources of information, are also providing inaccurate perceptions of physical therapy and even use of these media requires supervision to ensure that accurate information is being filtered out. Physical therapists, physical therapy associations and the School of Physical Therapy certainly need to take a more active and aggressive role in marketing the profession to students if they are to meet the growing need for physical therapy practitioners.

The sample used for this study was much larger than that of previous studies and would have given a better representation of the high school population. It would have been better, however, to have had a more balanced

representation from rural and urban locations and seniors and juniors. Clear instructions were given for the selection and administration procedure but the researchers were not physically present at all the sites to ensure that there was strict adherence to the procedure and inconsistencies in administration may have affected the results. In future studies, the researchers should try to do the selection and administration themselves.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that Trinidadian students have some basic knowledge about physical therapy; however, there are significant misconceptions about the profession that should be rectified. The main sources of the knowledge were television and internet with only a small percentage obtaining information from career fairs. It can be concluded from this study that focussed intervention is required by schools and other professional bodies to improve on students' knowledge regarding the profession of physical therapy.

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