Beyond evidence-based practice

The example of physiotherapy

Physiotherapy aims to improve people’s daily activities and participation in life. Physiotherapy originally functioned as an extension of a doctor’s practice, gaining knowledge primarily from biomedical sciences and from simulating authorities within the field. This has changed in recent years, with the profession working more autonomously, being directly accessible in most countries, formulating its own diagnoses from a biopsychosocial health perspective, working with other health disciplines and striving for both quality and accountability in its practice. One of the main drivers of these changes is the increasing focus on evidence-based practice. There is now an increasing evidence base, derived from a wide range of different research areas, resulting in a large knowledge base within physiotherapy. This is overwhelming for individual physiotherapists and there are difficulties in knowing how to navigate this information and extract what is most relevant. The result is that new knowledge does not sufficiently translate into practice, preventing innovation in the field. In a deeper vein the validity of knowledge is questioned more and more. The evidence base is considered to be objective and static/unchanging knowledge. Its use is demanded by financiers, through guidelines, which often do not match the complexity of daily practice. Dr Beenen’s research focuses on exploring the reasons for this ‘knowledge-to-action gap’, which exists both in physiotherapy and in most other health professions.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

There is an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice within healthcare. Despite a growing body of evidence, there remains a ‘knowledge-to-action gap’ whereby health professionals struggle to innovate their practice based upon available knowledge. For example, critical decision making, interdisciplinary work, patient-centred care, the emphasis on prevention and positive health perspectives have all generally yet to be incorporated into thinking and performance. Dr Paul Beenen, from Hanzehogeschool Groningen, explores the reasons for this gap, using the example of physiotherapy. Dr Beenen’s work also looks further afield to other healthcare areas as well as to the wider spheres of science, scientific research and health.

There is an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice within healthcare. Despite a growing body of evidence, there remains a ‘knowledge-to-action gap’ whereby health professionals struggle to innovate their practice based upon available knowledge. For example, critical decision making, interdisciplinary work, patient-centred care, the emphasis on prevention and positive health perspectives have all generally yet to be incorporated into thinking and performance. Dr Beenen’s work also looks further afield to other healthcare areas as well as to the wider spheres of science, scientific research and health.

Beyond evidence-based practice

The example of physiotherapy

Physiotherapy aims to improve people’s daily activities and participation in life. Physiotherapy originally functioned as an extension of a doctor’s practice, gaining knowledge primarily from biomedical sciences and from simulating authorities within the field. This has changed in recent years, with the profession working more autonomously, being directly accessible in most countries, formulating its own diagnoses from a biopsychosocial health perspective, working with other health disciplines and striving for both quality and accountability in its practice. One of the main drivers of these changes is the increasing focus on evidence-based practice. There is now an increasing evidence base, derived from a wide range of different research areas, resulting in a large knowledge base within physiotherapy. This is overwhelming for individual physiotherapists and there are difficulties in knowing how to navigate this information and extract what is most relevant. The result is that new knowledge does not sufficiently translate into practice, preventing innovation in the field. In a deeper vein the validity of knowledge is questioned more and more. The evidence base is considered to be objective and static/unchanging knowledge. Its use is demanded by financiers, through guidelines, which often do not match the complexity of daily practice. Dr Beenen’s research focuses on exploring the reasons for this ‘knowledge-to-action gap’, which exists both in physiotherapy and in most other health professions.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

There is an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice within healthcare. Despite a growing body of evidence, there remains a ‘knowledge-to-action gap’ whereby health professionals struggle to innovate their practice based upon available knowledge. For example, critical decision making, interdisciplinary work, patient-centred care, the emphasis on prevention and positive health perspectives have all generally yet to be incorporated into thinking and performance. Dr Paul Beenen, from Hanzehogeschool Groningen, explores the reasons for this gap, using the example of physiotherapy. Dr Beenen’s work also looks further afield to other healthcare areas as well as to the wider spheres of science, scientific research and health.
Evidence-informed practice

The complexity and variety of resources used in evidence-based physiotherapy practice demand more sophisticated epistemic beliefs.

References


Dr Paul Beenen from Hanzehogeschool Groningen looks at how epistemic beliefs influence innovation both in healthcare professionals and more widely.

Research Objectives

Based on Dr Beenen's premise, the research objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore how epistemic beliefs influence innovation both in healthcare professionals and more widely.

2. To synthesize knowledge for physiotherapy practice. Key steps towards review methodology.

3. To design a framework for decision making in evidence-informed practice.

4. To provide insights into the role of education and research in fostering evidence-informed practice.

Personal Response

Why are naïve epistemic beliefs so prevalent?

I believe we have been hugely successful in considering our world as a complicated system, especially in health care. However, complicated, like rocket science, it always follows the same steps and will arrive at the same outcome. This reductionist view allows us to analyze linear and unidirectional and detect all kinds of causal relations and intervene on this. It gives the added bonus of the feeling of control since the outcome can then be predicted. To accept a holistic worldview, we have to embrace complexity, and that means accepting uncertainty and loss of control. For professionals, this implies an immediate loss of status as their knowledge is no longer absolute. For many professionals this is a daunting prospect. Managing complex systems is like raising a child, you can’t control the outcome. It is necessary to embrace this uncertainty in order to understand and really be in this complex world. However, it doesn’t make life easier.

What inspired your research in this area?

I noticed in practice and the education of health professions and specifically physiotherapy, that very little of the much talked about ambitions were truly incorporated in our profession. For example, becoming more critical in our thinking, being more person centred, having a more holistic view on health. Our profession seems very locked in and thus not very innovative. My search is for keys to unlock true innovation in these areas. Just repeating the same ideas in different ways, seems very locked in and thus not very innovative.