

Authorship Patterns in Nigerian Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Journals: Are Nigerian physiotherapists publishing?*

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ABSTRACT

In order for any clinical science based profession to advance, there is need to update its knowledge base through research. The results of such research endeavours are usually disseminated through publications in scientific journals. The authorship pattern in two Nigerian physiotherapy and rehabilitation journals was studied. The aim was to establish the involvement of Nigerian physiotherapists in research and publishing by investigating the cadre of physiotherapists carrying out research activities and disseminating the results by publishing in physiotherapy professional journals in Nigeria. The level of collaborative research activity among cadres of physiotherapists and between them and other health care professionals was also investigated.

The journals of the Medical Rehabilitation Therapist Board (JMRT) and the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy (JNSP) published over a 17-year period (1991-2007) were reviewed. The publications were categorized according to the cadre (job description) of the physiotherapists and the type of articles published in each journal.

A total of 167 articles were reviewed in JMRT and 64 articles in JNSP. Out of these, 123(73.7%) and 47(73.4%) were published by physiotherapists in JMRT and JNSP respectively. A large percentage of the physiotherapists were in academics – JMRT

(46.1%) and JNSP (45.3%). A few of the articles were jointly published by clinical physiotherapists and academic physiotherapists (11.4% in JMRT & 14.1% in JNSP), while 8.3% in JMRT and 9.4% in JNSP were jointly published by physiotherapists and non physiotherapists. More of the articles published in JMRT (66.5%) were original research articles compared to JNSP (45.3%). The percentage of miscellaneous articles in JNSP (26.6%) was more than that found in JMRT (10.8%).

The study concluded that academic physiotherapists published more papers than their colleagues in the clinic, and that few intercadre and interdisciplinary articles were published in both journals. In addition there was a higher percentage of original articles in JMRT than in JNSP.

Key words: analysis, research publications, Nigerian physical therapy journals

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of a profession is dependent on the body of knowledge, and the research base at its disposal.¹ Research work gives credibility to, and promotes development in professions, including physiotherapy.² It is also believed to validate current practice, and satisfy increasing demands for account-

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ability of professional groups. Treatment is expected to be of high quality and cost effective, and this can only be achieved through research and the application of proven research findings.² In addition, research can demonstrate and improve the effective-ness of therapy techniques, intervention and modalities in relation to patient care.³ The benefits of research for clinical practice is also applicable and central to physical therapy.

For research to make the expected impact, the results must be documented in publications in order to have them validated and made legitimate for use.⁴ The integration of these published findings into clinical practice gives rise to evidence-based practice,⁵ which is expected to inform relevant changes in the way a patient is managed.⁶

Documented and published results of a clinical audit of case reports and clinically-based research serve as a major source for evidence-based practice. It is important for every community where physiotherapists are based to have information about the research activities of this professional group. This is the basis for this study, carried out to investigate the authorship pattern in two Nigerian physiotherapy and rehabilitation journals. The aim was to establish the involvement of Nigerian physiotherapists in research by investigating the cadre of physiotherapists carrying out research activities and disseminating the results by publishing in physiotherapy professional journals in Nigeria. The level of collaborative research activity among cadres of physiotherapists and between them and other health care professionals was also investigated.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The two physiotherapy and medical rehabilitation based journals published in Nigeria were reviewed – *Journal of the Medical Rehabilitation Therapists* (JMRT) and *Journal of the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy* (JNSP) published by the Medical Rehabilitation Therapists Board of Nigeria and the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy respectively. The JNSP is the only scientific publication of the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy while the JMRT is the only scientific publication of the Medical Rehabilitation

Therapists Board of Nigeria, the regulatory board for physiotherapy, speech therapy and audiology and occupational therapy in Nigeria. The review period covered 17 years (1991-2007). During this period 20 of JMRT and 9 issues of JNSP were published. While all the 9 issues of the JNSP were reviewed, only 17(85%) issues of the JMRT were available for review. All publications were classified according to the the nature/type of the study: an original study reporting first-hand information, a review or meta-analysis of the literature on a particular topic, a general or miscellaneous article that presents a general or philosophical discussion of a topic without original observation; or a case report.⁷

The articles were further categorized according to the cadres of the authors namely: physiotherapist clinicians (PTC), physiotherapist academics (PTA), non physiotherapists (NPT), joint publication by physiotherapy clinicians and physiotherapist academics (PTC + PTA), joint publication by physiotherapists and non physio-therapists (PT+NPT).

DATA HANDLING

Obtained data were entered and analyzed using the SPSS package 11.0 for windows (SPSS Inc; Chicago, USA). Descriptive statistics of percentages were used to summarize the data.

RESULTS

A total of 167 articles in JMRT and 64 articles in JNSP were reviewed, out of which 123(73.7%) and 47 (73.4%) were published by physiotherapists in JMRT and JNSP respectively. The distribution of authorship of the article in the two journals is presented in table 1. Table 2 shows the percentage distribution according to the type of article published.

DISCUSSION

The distribution of authors by cadre showed that majority of the publications were authored by academic physiotherapists in both journals compared to the number published by clinician physiotherapists.

Table 1. Distribution of articles according to the professional cadre of the author(s)

	n	%
JMRT		
PTC	13	7.8
PTA	77	46.1
PTC+PTA	19	11.4
NPT	44	26.3
NPT+PT	14	8.3
Total	167	100.0
JNSP		
PTC	3	4.6
PTA	29	45.3
PTC+PTA	9	14.1
NPT	17	26.6
NPT+PT	6	9.4
Total	64	100.0

Table 2. Categorization of articles according to type

	n	%
JMRTB		
Original study	111	66.5
Review	32	19.8
Case report	6	3.6
Gen/miscellaneous	18	10.8
Total	167	100.0
JNSP		
Original study	29	45.3
Review	11	17.2
Case report	7	10.9
Gen/miscellaneous	17	26.6
Total	64	100.0

Scientific activities including research and publications in peer review journals is part of the job description of the academic physiotherapists and constitutes an important requirement for promotion in the university set-up compared to the clinical physiotherapist who gets promoted on the basis of the number of years he/she has spent in the civil service. Research activities and publications are hardly given any consideration in the case of the clinical physiotherapist. Basing the promotion of the

academic physiotherapist on publications therefore, is bound to promote the habit of research and writing articles for publication in peer reviewed journals. However, about a tenth (11.1% – JMRT, 14.1% – JNSP) of the articles in both journals were co-authored by academic and clinical physiotherapists. This is a reflection of collaboration between the two subgroups. In an earlier study by Hamzat et al.⁹ exploring the research habits of Nigerian physiotherapists, all clinical physiotherapists involved in the study believed that clinicians should carry out research work and that such an endeavour would enhance their practice. In addition, Robertson² opined that clinicians are better placed to carry out clinical trials, clinical auditing, case studies, and single subject experimental design. He further stated that since physiotherapy is primarily a clinical profession and most of the expected outcomes from research relate to improving and validating practice, clinicians should be actively involved in such activities. Despite the advantages of carrying out research and the ease of designing certain types of research by clinical physiotherapists, the findings of the present study suggest a low level of publications (possibly due to low level of research activities) among clinical physiotherapists in Nigeria.

Factors that have been identified as responsible for the low level of research activities among clinical physiotherapists include time constraints, research skills, funding issues, mentoring or support for research design, and project planning, as stated by Walters and Birleson¹⁰. Other factors identified by Hamzat et al.⁹ include lack of incentive, poor library facilities and lack of equipment.

A poor interdisciplinary research culture exists between physiotherapists and other health professionals in Nigeria as was observed in this study. This is possibly because of the poor awareness of the physiotherapy profession by other professionals. It is also likely that interdisciplinary articles are published in other journals and not in the two journals reviewed. This finding is a challenge to physiotherapists and other health care professionals to collaborate for interdisciplinary research because

there is a redirection towards interdisciplinary research in different parts of the world.¹¹

Majority of the articles in JMRT were reports of original studies (66.5%), compared to JNSP in which less than half (45.3%) of the articles were original studies. The percentage of miscellaneous articles published in JNSP was more than that published in JMRT. The higher percentage of original articles seen in JMRT might be due to the fact that the purpose of the journal is to disseminate scientific information about various aspects of rehabilitation, which covers many professions such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and audiology. This means that every profession in the medical rehabilitation group in Nigeria would want to publish in JMRT. This probably gives rise to stiffer competition for publishing space. This will also invariably lead to a higher degree of scrutiny for article selection and encourage the submission of original articles.

Furthermore, the higher percentage of miscellaneous articles published in JNSP compared to that published in JMRT could be because the journal is exclusively for the dissemination of research findings in physiotherapy and also serves as a newsletter for disseminating information about the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy, the publisher of the journal. News items on the society, chairman's speech for previous annual general meeting, as sometimes published in the JNSP were categorized as miscellaneous articles and such were not present in the JMRT. In addition the low level of research activities among clinical physiotherapists who numbered more than academic physiotherapists⁹ might have created a dearth of articles to publish in the JNSP.

CLINICAL IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The low volume of research activities and publication of research findings will not encourage evidence based practice in Nigeria, especially in the physiotherapy profession. This will gradually lead to a decline in the standard of practice in Nigeria compared to other parts of the world. Physiotherapists, especially clinical physiotherapists, need to carry out research work and publish the

findings in their professional journals in order to make available evidence to improve practice of the physiotherapy profession in Nigeria.

Whereas the result of this work may be limited by the fact that it is possible that physiotherapist publish their research findings in non-physiotherapy journals, the study points to the need for more research work and publications by physiotherapists, especially clinical physiotherapists. Few interdisciplinary articles were published in the physiotherapy journals and the JMRTB had more original articles than the JNSP. These are areas that need to be remedied if the profession is to make progress in the area of evidence based practice in Nigeria.

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