Occupational Health Physical Therapists
Special Interest Group
Orthopaedic Section, APTA, Inc.

Newsletter

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OHPTSIG PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Summer is over, and it's time to focus our thoughts and attention on all of the personal and professional activities that fall and winter bring. It is almost certain that the issues that have been facing occupational health physical therapy will continue but with much more intensity. Congress has not made much headway this summer in overall health care reform, which can be viewed as a blessing of sorts for those of us in health care. However, the changes in workers' compensation at the state level continues to occur. These changes are having major impact on health care providers, especially those of us providing rehabilitation services. The trends that we are seeing in workers' compensation may very well be the trends for future health care reform.

One of these trends is that state legislatures and payor sources are repeatedly reporting that there is an over utilization of rehabilitation services in workers' compensation. Even though it pains me to think that this could be true, I have come to agree that rehabilitation services have been over utilized in many cases. I have heard the excuses that we give to justify this problem. They include: the physician owned physical therapy practices are the ones that are causing the problem, the problem occurs because nonphysical therapists are billing under physical therapy codes, etc. Even though these excuses are indeed part of the problem, we must also face the fact that the practice of some physical therapists is also part of the problem.

Too often I have reviewed cases where the attending therapist's treatment plan for a client with a musculoskeletal problem consisted of only passive modalities (hotpacks, cold packs, massage, ultrasound, etc.) The duration of this treatment plan is often weeks and, in many cases, months. The goals that have been established for the treatment plan have little functional relationship to essential physical requirements of the job. The determination for return to work is often based on the clients pain rather than functional ability.

Aggressive physical therapy programs that focus on the restoration of the clients functional ability in comparison to the physical requirements of the job have proven beneficial to all parties concerned. We need to demonstrate through functional outcomes the effectiveness of the services that we offer. We need to conduct more clinical research that is focused on scientifically justifying procedures that we use that have proven effective and to create new, effective methods and procedures. We need to listen to business/industry and insurance companies to learn how to effectively communicate with them rather than assume that we know what they need.

The health care reform of the future is occurring in workers compensation today. We, as physical therapists, have the knowledge and ability to be part of the solution of workers compensation rather than a part of the problem. The Special Interest Group has been instrumental this past year in fostering the development of an APTA Workers' Compensation Focus Group. This group is jointly sponsored by the APTA Board of Directors, Orthopaedic Section, Private Practice Section and the SIG. Its purpose is to identify the key issues in workers' compensation that are effecting the practice of physical therapy and develop appropriate strategies to respond to these issues. This group is still in its developing stages but appears that it will become a very strong force in the not so distant future. For a report on the first meeting of this group, see a related story in this newsletter.

The SIG has received approval to organize a round table discussion at the World Confederation for Physical Therapy Congress to be held in Washington, DC, June 25-30, 1995. This activity will provide an opportunity for physical therapists from around the world to interface and share concerns and ideas. More details on this will be forthcoming.

The elected officers of the SIG are in need of your input. Please contact one of the officers to discuss the issues you feel need to be addressed by the SIG.

Dennis Isernhagen, PT

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DISCLAIMER

The summaries of articles and the opinions expressed by authors are provided for information only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors, OHPTSIG or the Orthopaedic Section of the APTA.

FROM THE OHPTSIG SECRETARY

The Occupational Health PT Special Interest Group is pleased to join the Orthopaedic Section's quarterly publication, *Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Practice*, as a regular and, we hope, featured section. As you notice, *OP* has highlighted this SIG's newsletter by using clipped and shaded pages. This should allow you to quickly flip to these pages if that is your intent.

The OHPTSIG welcomes any comments and ideas for submissions in the newsletter. Inquiries can be directed to:

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PHYSICAL THERAPY PROFESSION NOW HAS A WORKERS' COMPENSATION VOICE

According to the National Council on Compensation Insurance, physical therapy charges are filed in 35% of all workers' compensation cases compared to only 4% of nonworkers' compensation cases. Furthermore, the average per case cost of physical therapy in workers' compensation cases is $1,777.00 compared to $597.00 for nonworkers' compensation cases.

THE CONFERENCE

In recognition of the significant role that physical therapy plays within the workers' compensation system, a focus group has been formed and jointly funded by the APTA, the Private Practice Section (PPS) and the Orthopaedic Section (OS). An inaugural conference held in Arlington, Virginia on April 16 and 17, 1994 was planned by focus group members Jan Richardson, Helene Fearon, Larry Fronheiser, Dennis Isernhagen, Rick Shutes, Jim Nugent and David Clifton.

In addition to speakers on physical therapy, the docket included Susan Griffith, Corporate Director of Rehabilitation for Reliance Insurance Company, and Carolyn Long, PT, of Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. These two payor representatives provided a candid portrayal of the pros and cons of the role that physical therapy plays in the workers' compensation system.

Conference Goals

To bring together physical therapists and experts in workers' compensation in order to:

- Identify critical issues that impact on the profession of physical therapy,
- Develop proactive strategies that will assure a role for physical therapy in the ever evolving workers' compensation arena,
- Develop a mechanism for the collection and dissemination of information on workers' compensation,
- Form a coalition among the APTA, OS and PPS in order to share resources and combine efforts toward common goals.

Conference Outcomes

Attendance at the conference was phenomenal, despite short notice. Physical therapists from approximately 35 states participated, forming a highly interactive group that collectively identified a preliminary list of four priority issues requiring immediate attention.

Priority List of Issues in Workers' Compensation	
1st	A greater degree of coordination needs to take place regarding the management of information among the APTA, its components, members at large, and those external to our profession.
2nd	True peer review for physical therapy services needs to be promoted to third party payors who conduct utilization review.
3rd	Profession-wide practice standards and outcome measures (including functional scales) are a critical need for the profession in general and for PTs providing services to workers' compensation claimants in particular.
4th	On-going education needs to be provided for PTs regarding the impact that trends in managed care have on the profession.

The second issue is especially important in light of escalating utilization review by third party payors, many of whom appear to consider physical therapy to be a generic term. Recent data indicates that third party payors are confused regarding the importance of distinguishing between "true" physical therapy services provided by PTs and PTAs and "generic" physical therapy services provided by nonlicensed persons. As a result, nonphysical therapists are frequently used inappropriately to review cases in which the payor was billed for physical therapy services.

Central to the conference participants' discussion was the need for some form of central intelligence and a system by which information can be disseminated to APTA members. Jim Nugent of the Reimbursement Department of APTA discussed current initiatives including bibliographic references contained on APTA-Net.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Workers' Compensation Focus Group continues to pursue strategies for addressing the aforementioned priority issues. A focus group meeting held in Toronto at the APTA Annual Conference developed a plan to implement the following mechanisms for improving the coordination and management of information:

- Electronic Information Center enhancement through APTA-Net bibliographic references pertinent to workers' compensation,
- Development of a "Fax Tree" to support APTA-Net entries,
- Additional staff/resources requested in the 1995 budget,
- Development of a "Strike Force" of knowledgeable workers' compensation experts to aid state chapters in peril.

Budgetary requests will be made to the APTA, OS, and PPS to continue to sponsor a Workers' Compensation Conference jointly on an annual basis.

Members of the Occupational Health Physical Therapy Special Interest Group will continue to play an active role in the Workers' Compensation Focus Group.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!

In order to preserve the role of physical therapy within the workers' compensation system, we need the help of APTA members. The ways in which you can help include:

- Contribute to the development of the APTA-Net database,
- Inform APTA of the workers' compensation trends that are emerging in your state,
- Inform APTA of any appointments of PTs to positions related to worker's compensation (e.g. Industrial Accident Boards, Workers' Compensation Boards, business coalitions, Governor's Councils, etc.),
- Attend next year's Workers' Compensation Conference

If you wish to contribute to the efforts of the Workers' Compensation Focus Group, please contact:

Jim Nugent
Reimbursement Department, APTA
1-800-999-APTA ext. 3175

SIG EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

We are currently making final arrangements for our Hot Topics Forum which will be held in Reno, NV at the Combined Sections Meeting in February 1995. The title of the presentation is "Are You Caught in the Workers Comp/ADA Trap?" We are planning a panel presentation with case studies. Our panelists include Susan Isernhagen, PT; Glenda Key, PT and an attorney from Carson City, Nevada. Many therapists are facing legal and ethical issues which may involve the employee/patient, the employer, medical providers, an attorney or all of the above. Hear how the experts are dealing with this important connection between workers compensation and the ADA. The meeting is on Saturday Feb. 11th from 1:30—2:30 p.m. This session will follow the SIG business meeting, on Saturday, Feb. 11th from 11:00—12:30. See you in Reno!

CALL FOR INTERESTED PARTIES

If you have an interest in research and a willingness to serve the profession, the Occupational Health Physical Therapy Special Interest Group invites you to consider participating in the development of a new research committee. Three members and a qualified chairperson are needed to begin the work of this critical committee. Any and all interested parties please contact Dennis Isernhagen at Isernhagen Clinics, c/o Isernhagen Works, 2202 Water Street, Duluth, MN 55812; phone 218/722-1399 or fax 218/722-1395.

HOTEL CHAIN FINDS HIGH QUALITY MEDICAL CARE CUTS INDEMNITY COSTS

Workers' Comp Managed Care, a publication of Business Information Services, made this report in their August 1994 edition. At a recent Washington D.C. conference sponsored by the National Association of Manufactors, a representative of Holiday Inn Worldwide reported that steering their injured workers to 'high quality' specialized care—for example skilled orthopaedists and physical therapists—has reduced their workers' compensation indemnity (lost time) costs and helped their bottom line. Although the article failed to specify the exact way Holiday Inn determines quality in its providers, they report that Holiday Inn is not as concerned with the cost of medical care as it is concerned with "Is it going in the right direction? Are people getting better?"

RESOURCES

Did you know that the Workers' Compensation Research Institute (WCRI) in Cambridge—a nonpartisan, not for profit public policy research organization funded by employers and insurers—routinely provides high quality information about public policy issues involving workers' compensation systems through its periodical "Research Briefs?" Did you know you do NOT have to be a supporting member of the WCRI in order to obtain these excellent briefs?

These "Briefs" report on significant ideas, issues, research studies and data of interest for anyone who must better understand workers' compensation systems. Some of their recent publications include:

- Cost Savings of Utilization Review
- Medical Cost Containment in Workers' Compensation
- The Americans with Disabilities Act and Workers' Compensation
- Containing Workers' Compensation Costs: Corporate Culture, Communication and Job Satisfaction
- Cost Drivers in New Jersey
- Return to Work Patterns and programs for injured workers covered by Texas' Workers' Compensation Insurance
- Medicolegal Fees in California
- Administrative Inventories discussing the Workers' Compensation systems in
  - Virginia
  - New Jersey
  - New Hampshire
  - California

For further information about the Institute, its work, membership or the Briefs, contact the Institute.

WCRI
101 Main Street
Cambridge, MA 02142
617/494-1240

ANNUAL SURVEY OUTLINES RISK MANAGEMENT ATTITUDES

An annual survey conducted the Alexander Consulting Group reports that risk managers surveyed felt that corporate America's biggest challenges are health care costs, workers' compensation and the civil justice system. Among the most critical issues to these key members of senior management were repetitive motion injuries and the potential liabilities these types of illnesses incur. Interestingly, approximately 68% of those surveyed felt that the need for an integrated approach to health care and workers' compensation was of 'above average importance.'

WORLD CONFEDERATION OF PHYSICAL THERAPY

In less than seven months, physical therapists from around the world will be arriving in the United States and flocking to Washington D.C. for the World Confederation of Physical Therapy Conference. The Conference is scheduled in D.C. from June 25 to June 30, 1995. The OHPTSIG has already begun work with the WCPT Conference Committee to have one or more roundtables with all international, industrial and occupational health physical therapists. More details on the roundtables and any occupational health/industrial programming will be upcoming in a future edition.

MANUAL FOR REVISED NIOSH LIFTING EQUATION AVAILABLE

A guide to the application of the new (revised 1993) lifting equation developed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is available from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). The guide, *Applications Manual for the Revised NIOSH Lifting Equation*, costs $12 plus $4 for shipping and handling. To order the Manual, contact NTIS at (703) 487-4650 and provide stock number PB94-176930LJM.

"SIG TIDBITS"

According to the Work Injury Management, the Americans with Disability Act was the key factor in boosting the EEOC's workload by nearly 22% in 1993, bringing in a record of nearly 88,000 charges filed. The story further reported that the commission's growing inventory has topped 80,000 pending cases with the average time to process a charge rising from 262 to 321 days.

According to a national study conducted by the Fraud Advisory Commission of the National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI), workers' compensation fraud accounts for 25% of all workers' comp claims. The two most common fraud types are:

- a worker who presents an injury as more serious than it actually is
- a worker who actually holds another job while collecting lost time benefits from the original employer

The commission outlined suggestions for reducing fraud which included: support of anti-fraud legislation; educational programs for healthcare providers, regulators, administrative law judges, employers and workers; establishment of state fraud units and development of a database for use by regulators and insurers.

Business Insurance, a weekly insurance publication, recently reported that the 10 most common ADA claims were:

10 most common ADA claims

based on 26,302 claims to EEOC between 7/26/92 and 4/30/94

	% of Total
Back injuries	20
Neurological	13
Emotional/psychiatric	11
Extremities	6
Heart	5
Substance Abuse	4
Diabetes	4
Hearing Impairment	3
Vision Impairment	3
Cancer	3

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Nominating Committee of the Orthopaedic Section's Occupational Health Physical Therapists SIG is soliciting candidates for the offices of President, Treasurer and Member of the Nominating Committee. The election will be held at the Combined Sections Meeting scheduled for Reno, Nevada, February 8 - 12, 1995.

If you wish to be more involved and contribute to the growth and development of Occupational Health Physical Therapy, please contact members of the Nominating Committee as listed or contact Tara Fredrickson at the Orthopaedic Section office, 1-800-444-3982.

Dennis Driscoll, PT
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2555 E. Adams Street
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Special thanks to the following individuals for their submission of articles:
David Clifton
Joanette Alpert
Susan Abeln
Dennis Isernhagen

The SIG Executive Board encourages input from all of the members. If you have any questions or concerns relating to the SIG, please feel free to contact any of the officers:

President	Dennis Isernhagen, Duluth, MN
Vice-President	Karen Piegorsch, Columbia, SC
Secretary	Susan Abeln, San Clemente, CA
Treasurer	Dottie Nelson, Shohomish, WA

If you would like to become a member of the SIG, you must first be a member of the Orthopaedic Section. Call Tara Fredrickson, Administrative Assistant to the Orthopaedic Section, at 1-800-444-3982 for inclusion on the SIG mailing list. Also, if you need to update your mailing address, please contact the Orthopaedic Section office.