

Exploring the issues for regional therapists in professional development and clinical management of neurological patients in Victoria

Jan Quiney¹, Thao Nguyen², Samantha Plumb³, Marlena Klaic⁴

1 Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan St, Parkville, Victoria 3050, Jan.Quiney@mh.org.au

2 Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan St, Parkville, Victoria 3050, Thao.Nguyen3@mh.org.au

3 Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan St, Parkville, Victoria 3050, Marlena.Klaic@mh.org.au

Background

Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) has successfully held a course for the management of hemiplegic upper limbs for the past 4 years. This course relies on strong theoretical and practical components. The half day RMH course is attended by physiotherapists (PT) and occupational therapists (OT). Funding from the Pat Cosh fund allowed for this course to be modified for videoconferencing to improve access for regional therapists. Whilst the lectures would be delivered live, 'champions' from the OT and PT departments of three regional sites attended RMH for a training day, to facilitate the practical components at their sites on the day. A focus group was held on this 'champions' training day with consent from all 12 participants. The aim of the focus group was to establish barriers to professional development (PD), and to developing clinical skill and reasoning in neurological patients.

Methods

A facilitated focus group with the 12 participants was recorded, transcribed, and is being analysed for themes.

Results

Preliminary analysis of the focus group indicates themes that are both specific to regional sites, and similar to issues at tertiary sites. Specific themes relate to department size, culture, structure and seniority, and broad clinical caseloads. There is evident concern from the therapists regarding support and access to clinical experts, with many Grade 1s / 2s being the most senior therapist managing a neurological patient. Other identified barriers, also commonly reported in tertiary services, included staffing shortages, a strong patient focus and therefore difficulty prioritising PD or non-clinical tasks, and the unpredictability and rapid changes in the acute setting.

Therapists participating in the focus group identified ideas to address some of the issues raised. Full analysis of the focus group and the course using this new methodology will provide further detail on the barriers and possible ways to address the issues.