

Minimum standards of clinical practice for physiotherapists working in Australian and New Zealand critical care settings: a modified Delphi technique.

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Background

Although physiotherapy intervention in critical care reduces hospital length of stay, graduate competency is not considered essential. As a result, training and clinical practice standards may vary. This study aimed to establish a framework of expert consensus-based minimum standards of clinical practice for physiotherapists working in critical care in Australia and New Zealand.

Methods

A modified Delphi technique was used to obtain consensus on 217 items grouped into 19 common themes of critical care physiotherapy practice. An expert panel of cardiorespiratory clinicians, academics and specialists (n = 61) was invited from a pool of eligible physiotherapists (n = 93). Eligibility criteria were defined *a-priori* on the basis of expertise in the practice and teaching of critical care physiotherapy. Questionnaires were developed using empirical resources including landmark peer-reviewed publications and textbooks. Questionnaires were piloted, refined and disseminated electronically (three survey rounds via SurveyMonkey®). Participants ranked items using response options 'Essential/Unsure/Not Essential'. Consensus was defined as achieved in favour or against when items were ranked 'Essential' or 'Non Essential' by more than 70% of participants, respectively.

Results

Fifty physiotherapists consented and participated in the initial round. Forty-five (90%) completed all rounds. Consensus was reached on 199 (89%) items. The panel agreed that 132 (58%) items were 'Essential' for inclusion in the final framework. Essential items included skills in conducting and analysing assessment across the spectrum of the physiotherapy role including accurate/independent assessment and interpretation of readings from laboratory investigations such as troponin, blood glucose levels. Essential skills in physiotherapy intervention delivery included being able to provide oxygen therapy, humidification, manual hyperinflation and mobilization of ventilated and non-ventilated patients.

Discussion

This is the first study to develop an expert consensus framework of minimum standards of clinical practice for critical care physiotherapists. The clinical and education utility of this framework requires further assessment.

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