



Building Bridges: Physical Therapy and Inclusive Education in Interprofessional Collaboration

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Introduction

Inclusive education is an approach to education in which learners with various disabilities and learning needs are educated in courses alongside learners without disabilities [1]. It entails providing learning opportunities for all students by changing the system to fit the student [2]. It can have an immense effect on learners with disabilities because it may boost their academic and social development and skills, improve their self-esteem and well-being, allow them to be more participative, and providing them with the opportunity to attain their full potential.

Interprofessional collaboration (IPC) refers to the shared learning between health disciplines guided by qualities like respect and trust [3]. It is the process of healthcare professionals from different disciplines working together to provide care for patients [4]. This collaboration involves a team approach to care, mutual respect, effective communication, and shared decision-making among team members to ensure that patients receive the best possible care.

However, IPC is not exclusive to healthcare professionals, and it can also be performed between healthcare and teaching professionals. For example, it may involve rehabilitation professionals such as physical therapists working together with inclusive education teachers to support the development of learners with disabilities and ensure that they receive the necessary support to achieve their academic and social goals, and to create inclusive learning environments that meet the diverse needs of all students.

The process of physical therapy, which includes rehabilitation and habilitation, involves helping a child move or use their body in a healthier way [5]. It may positively impact the physical performance of learners with disabilities, especially those with impairments in mobility, balance, and coordination. Given the benefits of physical therapy towards learners with disabilities, it may be important to discuss the nuances when it comes to the IPC between physical therapists and inclusive education teachers towards learners with disabilities.

Importance of IPC

IPC is an important aspect of providing inclusive education to learners with disabilities. Effective IPC requires that all professionals involved in a learner's health and education communicate with each other about their progress, strengths, needs, and any other relevant information [6]. This includes the collaboration between rehabilitation team members such as a physical therapist and the teaching staff such as an inclusive education teacher.

Several arguments exist towards proving the positive impact of IPC between physical therapists and inclusive education teachers for learners with disabilities, especially to create a more inclusive environment for them.

Collaboration between physical therapists and inclusive education teachers may be crucial for promoting the educational and developmental needs of learners with disabilities as well as

help to address their complex needs. By working collaboratively, physical therapists and inclusive education teachers can also provide support to families and help to enhance the overall quality of life for the learners, especially since all professionals involved with the learner share the responsibility of ensuring that parents are aware of their rights and encouraged to be active participants in program planning for their children [7].

IPC also promotes shared learning and professional development among physical therapists and inclusive education teachers. This can lead to a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.

Impact of IPC for Inclusive Education Teachers

Including physical therapists within inclusive education schools is crucial for promoting the development of learners with disabilities. Physical therapists can provide guidance to teachers on the specific physical needs of individual students and design programs to support them. This can help teachers understand the physical abilities and limitations of their students, which can ensure that students are not excluded from activities due to physical limitations. Moreover, physical therapists can train teachers on intervention strategies that can be used inside classrooms to support the physical development of their learners. Lastly, collaboration between physical therapists and teachers can lead to improved communication in the education of a learner with disability, ensuring that they receive consistent support and that everyone is working towards the same goals.

Impact of IPC for Physical Therapists

Inclusive education teachers can guide physical therapists about a learner's daily routine, activities, and performance in the classroom. This information can help physical therapists to tailor their interventions and treatment plans to the specific needs of each learner. Teachers can also provide feedback on a learner's progress, which can help physical therapists to modify their interventions and ensure that they are effective. This can also help to ensure that physical therapy goals are aligned with academic goals and that therapy interventions are integrated into the learner's daily routine. Furthermore, collaboration between physical therapists and teachers can promote the dissemination of therapy skills to the classroom so that teachers can also reinforce the skills that learners learn in physical therapy sessions, which can help students to apply those skills in other contexts.

Challenges of IPC

While IPC is important for promoting inclusive education, several challenges are associated with IPC between physical therapy and inclusive education teachers. These challenges can include differences in professional cultures, lack of understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, and communication barriers.

Also, despite the field of education recognizing the importance of IPC, faculties of education have yet to formally address IPC as part of their programming. One reason for this oversight is that faculties of education are often siloed environments, focusing solely on teaching [4, 8].

A lack of support from the school towards the promotion of teamwork and collaboration can negatively impact the development of IPC within schools [9]. Additionally, the same lack of support or attention from governing agencies such as local government units on disability-inclusive initiatives is also considered a challenge.

Ways Forward

To address these challenges, it is important to provide training and education on IPC, enhance information sharing, develop guidelines, assign a focal person [4], and involving the parents can help to enhance IPC and promote the development of effective strategies for supporting the needs of learners with disabilities.

Physical therapists and inclusive education teachers both play important roles in addressing student-related needs. Physical therapists assess and treat physical impairments that may impact a learner's mobility or independence. Inclusive education teachers create inclusive learning environments that support the needs of learners with disabilities. By collaborating together, they can provide support that meets the unique needs of each learner.

In terms of program-related needs, physical therapists could work with inclusive education teachers in promoting inclusivity and accessibility in schools by modifying environmental barriers, establishing accessibility guidelines, promoting acceptance and inclusivity, and developing safety procedures.

Conclusion

Inclusive education provides opportunities for learners with disabilities to achieve their full potential, and IPC between physical therapists and inclusive education teachers is crucial for promoting the educational and developmental needs of these learners. However, challenges must be addressed to improve its implementation. Overall, physical therapists and inclusive education teachers both play important roles in meeting the unique needs of each learner, and their collaborative efforts can create inclusive learning environments that support the physical, cognitive, and social needs of all students.

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