

The impact of a specialist physiotherapy service for homeless people: a qualitative study

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Background: Homeless people and their health



Why might homeless people benefit from physiotherapy?

Rehabilitation for...

- Musculoskeletal
- Respiratory
- Neurological

....conditions



What do we know about this topic so far?

BMJ Open Homeless people's access to primary care physiotherapy services: an exploratory, mixed-method investigation using a follow-up qualitative extension to core quantitative research

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ABSTRACT

Objectives The purpose of this study was to appraise referrals of homeless patients to physiotherapy services and explore perceptions of barriers to access.

Design This exploratory mixed-method study used a follow-up qualitative extension to core quantitative research design. Over 9 months, quantitative data were gathered from the healthcare records of homeless patients referred to physiotherapy by a general practitioner (GP) practice, including the number of referrals and demographic data of all homeless patients referred. Corresponding physiotherapy records of those people referred to physiotherapy were searched for the outcome of their care. Qualitative semi-structured telephone interviews, based on the quantitative findings, were carried out with staff involved with patient care from the referring GP practice and were used to expand insight into the quantitative findings.

Setting Two primary care sites provided data for this study: a GP practice dedicated exclusively to homeless

Strengths and limitations of the study

- This study explores homeless people's access to physiotherapy, a topic that previously has received little attention.
- It is a mixed-method study, which uses a follow-up qualitative extension to core quantitative research design and as it is on a small scale, restricted to one GP practice and one physiotherapy department, its findings may not be generalisable.
- The scope of the study did not extend to interviewing homeless people themselves about their experience of accessing physiotherapy, which might have restricted reported perspectives.
- Difficulty matching patient records from two different healthcare record systems resulted in the exclusion of some patient records in the data analysis, potentially distorting conclusions.

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Homelessness: reaching out to the hard to reach

Homeless people often fall off the radar of mainstream services, but some physios are trying to change that – over the Christmas period and longer-term. Andrew Cole reports



inclusion
healthcare



streetsmart physio
free treatment and outreach street service



Setting



streetsmart physio

free treatment and outreach street service



RESEARCH

Aim of this study

To explore the 'Streetsmart Physio' service from the perspective of homeless people and those who provide the service

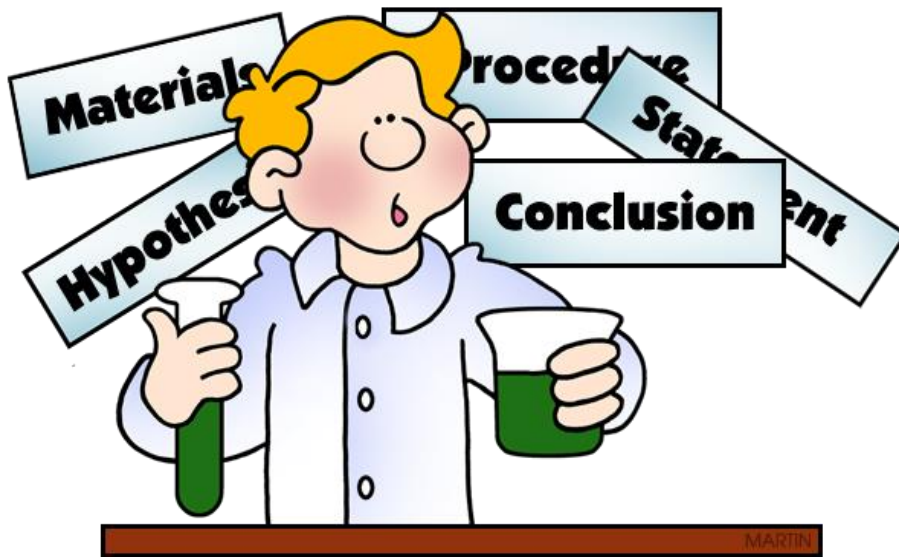
ETHICS



Queen Margaret University

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Methods: Qualitative design



Data collection:

- semi-structured interviews
- audio recorded
- transcribed verbatim

Data analysis:

- thematic analysis

Participants

Eleven people in total interviewed:

- 4 homeless people who had made use of physiotherapy service (all male)
- 3 homeless people who had not used the service (all male)
- 4 Physiotherapists who volunteer at physiotherapy clinic (three male, one female)



Findings

Participants' views of
Streetsmart Physio service

Value of
physiotherapy for
homeless people

Considerations for
physiotherapists
working effectively
with homeless
people

Barriers to
mainstream
healthcare

Optimising
physiotherapy
services for
homeless
people



Barriers to mainstream healthcare

*'The hospitals they treat you like sh*t, really, sorry for swearing but they dae. As they know you've got a drug problem... you're basically scum of the earth ye know...'*

Jimmy, physio service user

Access



Bureaucracy

The value of physiotherapy for homeless people

'Em, for me it's actually helped like my future, eh it's helped me to figure out ... what has happened to me and [it's] not too worrying. It's good to know'.

William, physio service user

'You'd be surprised how much trauma is out there. You know, like, people who've been beaten up ... there's quite a lot of injuries or car accidents, people being drunk, being knocked down by cars. Em, a lot of injuries that hadn't been followed up by the NHS services, so people having fractured femurs not going back to the clinic, developing all sorts of problems with that. So, we've picked up quite a lot of chronic conditions because they'd just neglected themselves'.

Ben, volunteer physiotherapist

Participants' views of StreetSmart Physio service

'These guys are so thorough, like I would rather come to this than the NHS, This is far more detailed and at a slower pace really'.

Dave, physio service user

Evening
appointments
work well

'Salvation
Army
bubble'

Had not heard of
the 'StreetSmart
Physio' service

Caring and
approachable
volunteers

Ideal
location

Homeless people
outside the hostel
unaware of the
service



Considerations for physiotherapists working effectively with homeless people

'I'm very aware of ... saying something simple like oh 'home exercise programme' or you know 'the empty can test' can just wording that in a way that doesn't in synonymous to the eh eh eh to the can of alcohol, because a lot of them have alcohol problems'.

Callum, volunteer physio

'I feel when I go I feel like I'm not part of society. I am part of society'

**Adam, physio
service user**

Approach: sensitivity, self-awareness and adaptation of treatment

Professional boundaries and scope of practice



Optimising physiotherapy services for homeless people

Stability of
accommodation
influences access

Enable access to
service by wider
homeless population

Liaison with
established
homeless health
services



What does this mean in practice?



- Physiotherapy is valued by homeless people who access it
- To support homeless people's access to physiotherapy, both mainstream and specialist services are needed
- Gathering homeless people's views is of value for steering future services

STRENGTHS

- Qualitative design-depth of understanding
- By hearing views of service providers and people who had and had not used service, allowed a breadth of understanding

WEAKNESSES

- Small scale study limited to one site
- relatively novice researcher carried out data collection and analysis



- **Further research into accessibility of physiotherapy for homeless people**
- **Improve awareness of need of homeless people amongst physiotherapy service providers**

Thank you!



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