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IP Journal of Surgery and Allied Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://www.jsas.co.in/>

Review Article

Enhancing evidence-based physiotherapy practice in India: Navigating patient expectations and financial pressures

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 05-11-2024

Accepted 12-12-2024

Available online 16-01-2025

Keywords:

Physiotherapy

Evidence based

Indian scenario

Financial constraints

ABSTRACT

Evidence-based physiotherapy practice is essential for ensuring effective, safe, and standardized care. In India, however, physiotherapists often face challenges when trying to implement evidence-based interventions due to patient expectations for immediate, often symptom-oriented relief, as well as financial pressures from clinics and institutions. This narrative review aims to explore these unique challenges and propose strategies to improve the uptake of evidence-based physiotherapy in Indian clinical settings. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, patient expectations, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors affecting physiotherapy in India are analyzed. Findings suggest that improving communication, fostering shared decision-making, and adopting patient-centered modifications are key to aligning patient satisfaction with evidence-based care. The review concludes by identifying gaps in current research and recommending policy changes to promote a broader acceptance of evidence-based practice across India.

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1. Introduction

Physiotherapy has become an essential component of healthcare, addressing conditions ranging from musculoskeletal pain to neurological and cardiopulmonary rehabilitation. Globally, the shift towards evidence-based practice (EBP) has enhanced the effectiveness and standardization of physiotherapy care, helping practitioners select interventions backed by scientific research and clinical expertise. However, implementing EBP in the Indian physiotherapy landscape presents unique challenges. The Indian healthcare context is shaped by socio-cultural expectations, economic constraints, and limited access to high-quality evidence-based resources. Patients often expect immediate pain relief, typically

associating physiotherapy with passive treatments, such as electrical stimulation or manual therapies, rather than the active, evidence-based approaches that may take longer to show results. Additionally, many physiotherapy clinics face financial pressures to maintain high patient volumes, which may discourage the adoption of time-intensive, evidence-based interventions.¹

This review aims to examine the barriers to EBP in Indian physiotherapy practice and propose strategies to enhance its adoption. It will explore current patient expectations, financial constraints, and cultural factors affecting physiotherapy and identify areas where future research and policy development are needed.

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2. Definition and Scope of Evidence-Based Physiotherapy Practice

Evidence-Based Physiotherapy Practice: Evidence-based physiotherapy practice (EBP) integrates the best available research evidence with clinical expertise and patient preferences to guide treatment decisions. In physiotherapy, EBP involves selecting and applying interventions that are scientifically proven to be effective, thus improving patient outcomes and enhancing treatment reliability. For physiotherapists, this means balancing research-backed approaches with individualized care. This review assesses how these principles apply in the Indian context, where implementing EBP is often challenged by traditional treatment preferences and systemic limitations.²

The Indian Context: Physiotherapy in India is a rapidly growing field but is characterized by a combination of established traditional practices and emerging scientific methodologies. While some practitioners rely on evidence-based interventions, many continue to use conventional methods, such as passive modalities or manual therapies, partly due to patient expectations for immediate relief. According to recent statistics, Indian physiotherapists report limited adoption of EBP practices, with a tendency to rely on symptomatic treatment methods. The dual influence of traditional expectations and modern approaches in India highlights the need for more consistent implementation of EBP to achieve standardized, effective patient care.³

3. Overview of Current Evidence in Indian Physiotherapy

3.1. Patient expectations and treatment preferences

Patient expectations in India often prioritize rapid symptomatic relief, typically favoring passive treatments like electrical stimulation or manual therapies over active rehabilitation methods that require sustained patient involvement. Studies indicate that many Indian patients expect physiotherapy to be immediately effective, which may conflict with the outcomes of evidence-based approaches that focus on functional improvement and long-term recovery. This discrepancy underscores the importance of educating patients about the benefits of EBP while setting realistic expectations to support adherence to recommended treatment plans.⁴

3.2. Barriers to evidence-based practice

A significant barrier to adopting EBP in Indian physiotherapy practice is the lack of institutional and systemic support, such as limited resources, restricted access to recent research, and insufficient funding for continuing education programs. Additionally, inadequate insurance coverage for physiotherapy and a lack of structured guidelines have created challenges in

delivering EBP. This review explores the impact of these systemic barriers on physiotherapists' ability to implement scientifically supported interventions and considers how resource limitations can hinder the consistent application of EBP across various regions.⁵

Cultural Influences on Patient Preferences: India's socio-cultural context greatly influences patient preferences in physiotherapy, with a notable reliance on alternative medicine and traditional healing practices. These cultural beliefs can sometimes conflict with evidence-based practices, leading patients to favor methods perceived as natural or familiar. Studies have shown that in India, physiotherapists often modify treatment plans to accommodate these beliefs. Recognizing the role of culture in shaping treatment expectations is essential for physiotherapists aiming to provide patient-centered, evidence-based care that is also culturally sensitive.

4. Section 3: Methodological Considerations in Indian Physiotherapy Research

4.1. Current research limitations

Physiotherapy research in India often faces methodological limitations, including small sample sizes, regional disparities, and funding restrictions. These limitations reduce the generalizability of findings and can affect the quality and applicability of the evidence available to practitioners. Additionally, the lack of multi-center or large-scale studies in Indian physiotherapy literature constrains the ability of practitioners to rely on high-quality, localized evidence when making clinical decisions. The limited scope of research in India emphasizes the need for more robust, comprehensive studies to inform EBP.⁶

4.2. Need for localized research

Conducting high-quality, India-specific research is essential to effectively implement EBP in Indian physiotherapy. Physiotherapists often rely on international research, which may not fully consider India's unique cultural, economic, and healthcare-related factors. Localized research that reflects regional patient demographics and socio-economic variables would allow Indian practitioners to tailor evidence-based approaches to their specific context. This review stresses the importance of prioritizing such research to bridge the gap between global evidence and local practice needs.

5. Critical Analysis and Synthesis of Challenges and Strategies

5.1. Balancing patient satisfaction with EBP

Patient-centered care is crucial in India, where patient satisfaction significantly influences adherence and

outcomes. Studies indicate that Indian patients prefer personalized care, which may sometimes conflict with standardized evidence-based protocols. Strategies for managing this include educating patients about the long-term benefits of EBP and setting realistic expectations about treatment outcomes. These approaches can help physiotherapists balance the need for evidence-based interventions with the goal of maintaining high levels of patient satisfaction and adherence.⁷

5.2. Financial pressures and resource limitations

Financial constraints are a common challenge in Indian physiotherapy, impacting both patients and clinics. Limited financial resources may discourage physiotherapists from adopting time-intensive, evidence-based practices that may not be reimbursed by insurance. This review examines the balance between cost-effectiveness and quality care, recommending strategies to minimize costs without compromising on evidence-based methods, such as using group therapy sessions or prioritizing high-yield interventions.

5.3. The role of healthcare policy

Current policies related to physiotherapy in India do not sufficiently promote the use of EBP, partly due to limited funding and a lack of structured guidelines for physiotherapy practice. Policy reforms that support physiotherapy education, continuing professional development, and insurance reimbursement for evidence-based treatments could significantly enhance the quality and consistency of care. This review discusses potential policy changes to encourage EBP adoption and suggests that increased funding for physiotherapy training and resources would benefit practitioners and patients alike.⁸

6. Implications for Practice and Policy in India

6.1. Improving patient education

Enhancing patient education is crucial for increasing EBP uptake in Indian physiotherapy. Educating patients on the benefits of evidence-based treatments, including the importance of active, functional rehabilitation over passive modalities, can improve patient adherence to EBP protocols. This review highlights the importance of using culturally relevant, accessible language in patient education to ensure understanding and support for EBP.

6.2. Insurance and financial reforms

Policy reforms supporting insurance coverage for physiotherapy are essential to encourage the use of EBP. Currently, many physiotherapists in India face pressure to provide treatments that patients can afford, even if these are not the most effective evidence-based options. Expanding

insurance coverage for evidence-based treatments would reduce financial barriers and allow physiotherapists to prioritize EBP approaches.⁹

6.3. Continuing education and training

Ongoing education is vital for physiotherapists to stay current with the latest research and refine their evidence-based skills. This review suggests incorporating EBP into physiotherapy curricula and providing accessible continuing education programs. Training initiatives focused on EBP can empower physiotherapists to deliver high-quality care while remaining responsive to patient needs.

7. Discussion

The integration of evidence-based physiotherapy (EBP) into clinical practice in India faces significant challenges rooted in patient expectations, financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors. Patients often prioritize immediate symptomatic relief and passive modalities, such as electrical stimulation or manual therapy, over evidence-based, active rehabilitation approaches that may require more time and active participation. This mismatch between patient preferences and evidence-based methods complicates treatment adherence and long-term recovery. Financial pressures in clinics, driven by the need for high patient volumes, further discourage physiotherapists from adopting time-intensive, evidence-based interventions. Additionally, systemic barriers, such as limited access to up-to-date research, inadequate insurance coverage, and the influence of traditional healing practices, contribute to the slow uptake of EBP. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to educate patients about the long-term benefits of active rehabilitation, adjust evidence-based protocols to align with cultural expectations, and advocate for policy reforms that promote greater financial support and professional development for physiotherapists. By balancing the need for effective, evidence-based interventions with patient-centered care and systemic reforms, India can foster a more sustainable, high-quality physiotherapy practice that benefits both patients and the broader healthcare system.^{10,11}

8. Future Research Directions

8.1. Expanding India-specific research

There is a significant need for longitudinal studies on patient outcomes using evidence-based interventions in India. Expanded research in this area would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of EBP within the Indian context. By prioritizing local research, Indian physiotherapy can generate data that supports the development of region-specific guidelines and protocols.¹²

8.2. Cultural adaptation of evidence-based protocols

Western evidence-based protocols may require adaptation to fit the Indian socio-cultural context. Future studies should explore how to modify these protocols to account for cultural beliefs, language differences, and treatment preferences. This review encourages research that tailors EBP approaches to align with Indian cultural factors, improving acceptance and effectiveness.

8.3. Evaluating cost-effectiveness of EBP

Research on the cost-effectiveness of EBP approaches is needed to demonstrate their value in the long term. By showcasing how EBP can lead to sustainable outcomes and reduced healthcare costs, such research can support efforts to promote EBP adoption among clinicians and policymakers.^{13,14}

9. Conclusion

In India, integrating evidence-based physiotherapy into daily practice requires a multifaceted approach that respects patient expectations while promoting scientifically validated interventions. By addressing financial pressures and investing in patient education, physiotherapists can enhance the adoption of EBP in ways that benefit both patients and the healthcare system as a whole. This review underscores the importance of policy changes and future research to facilitate a sustainable, evidence-based approach to physiotherapy practice in India.

10. Source of Funding

None.

11. Conflict of Interest

None.

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Cite this article: Thiyagarajan A, Jeyakumar S, Jeeva K. Enhancing evidence-based physiotherapy practice in India: Navigating patient expectations and financial pressures. *IP J Surg Allied Sci* 2024;11(4):110-113.