

## Future Perspectives of Physical Therapy in Asia

### 4 Challenges of Physical Therapists in a Developing Country

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In the Philippines, physical therapy was legally recognized as a profession 45 years ago. However, prior to the signing of our practice regulatory act, basic physical therapy services were already made available in a limited number of institutions who were primarily catering to patients with orthopedic concerns. Over the years, the development of the profession in our country was significantly affected by : (1) low professional registration due to low higher education enrollment ; (2) maldistribution of registered professionals ; (3) migration of Filipino PTs to the US and Middle Eastern countries ; and (4) low level of awareness and public demand for PT service. It was only in the 1990s when there was a rapid increase in the number of student enrollees, which subsequently led to a surge in the number of professional registration. Such a deviation from the previous pattern was heavily motivated by the increasing demand for rehabilitation professionals and services in the US. The sudden decrease in international demand by the late 1990s and early 2000s, somehow, proved to be beneficial for the local development of the profession as more practitioners decided to stay in the country, and establish careers, initially, as clinicians and educators. Over the recent years, careers in research, administration and management, policy development, and community development have gradually been explored by Filipino PTs.

However, such a decrease in international demand also resulted to a decline in the supply side of the equation locally.

As the Philippines is now experiencing incremental societal changes due to recent economic gains as a developing nation, the physical therapy profession is facing a new set of challenges in answering evolving demands. These include :

- (1) Answering the slowly increasing demand for PT services given the alarming increase in non – communicable disease cases ;
- (2) Resolving the persistent maldistribution of physical therapy services between urban and rural areas ;
- (3) Managing the continued migration of health care professionals ;
- (4) Ensuring relevant participation in the regional and global arena ;
- (5) Monitoring the implementation of a new professional education paradigm (outcomes – based education and graduate program standards) ;
- (6) Developing involvement and maximizing immersions in professional practice areas ;
- (7) Amending the dated framework of professional regulation ; and
- (8) Formulating and implementing more relevant practice act provisions.

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### 5 World Physical Therapy Challenge for the profession

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Physical Therapy (PT) is an emerging profession for 21st century. Challenges facing the profession are education system, specialist training, and also competitiveness among health profession. Enhanced evidence-based education is necessary for our profession to gain strong reputation among fast growing inter-professional arena. Developing standard and guidelines for PT entry level curriculum in response to the changing research evidences could be an essential part of education reform. Post-graduate specialist training increases more opportunities for PTs to compete with other related health professions. Although skills in movement sciences have already been established as the core of our profession, integrations of advanced diagnosis techniques, neuroscience, and regenerative science are essential to achieve the movement goals. The outcomes of PT services must be measurable and perceived by our clients. This would lead to improvement in self referral and universal health coverage for PT services that are two main issues currently been explored in several countries. For example ; in Thailand, self referral is legal, however, it is only currently practical for private PT clinics not for public

hospitals. This is partly due to the limitations of inter-profession communication and also shortage of PT specialists in public hospitals. As for universal health coverage, basic and home care for PT services are covered. Extension of coverage to outsource PT services to private PT clinics has just been granted in a recent National Health Security bylaw. New regulations follow this bylaw will be a real challenge to construct a better and more extensive PT service system as part of the universal health coverage. Not only the expanding of PT services in Thailand but also in all ASEAN communities, the number of aged population is increasing, as a result, more skilled PTs are required. The Japanese Physical Therapy Association, as an association with the highest number of PT members, could share experience and knowledge with other ASEAN countries to increase both quantity and quality of PTs to serve the need of the region. Mobilization of PT students and practice in the region should be an agenda to explore further to improve the PT services in 21st century. English language, standard competency, and refine referral system are also needed to be discussed among countries in this region.