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A home physiotherapy service for stroke patients in Malta: constraints and recommendations. The process of setting up a home physiotherapy service for hospitalised stroke patients within the public health system in Malta - new knowledge contributing to a strategy document.

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ABSTRACT

Title of thesis

“A home physiotherapy service for stroke patients in Malta: constraints and recommendations” by Stephen Lungaro-Mifsud, supervised by Dr. Deborah Hepworth.

Keywords: home physiotherapy, Public Health Service, Malta, stroke, barrier, constraint, interview, qualitative method, strategy document.

Introduction

Home physiotherapy is a valid service option for the patient who was recently discharged from hospital after sustaining a stroke, as it enhances functional independence in friendly and familiar surroundings, as opposed to an outpatient clinic (Bader 2008).

The aim of this study was to investigate the system responses to the planning and implementation of a home physiotherapy service as an innovation within the Maltese Public Health Service, uncovering barriers or constraints that influenced the introduction and development of state-run home physiotherapy in Malta.

Method

A qualitative approach was used for this research. A case study design was selected because it possessed contextual, descriptive and heuristic characteristics. Study participants planned and implemented the service using the available resources. Policy makers, physiotherapists, stroke patients and caregivers contributed to the study through their responses to, and experiences of, this service innovation. It was both an exploration and an opportunity to learn about service innovation from a Maltese perspective.

A group of stakeholders were interviewed during the planning stage (Phase 1) of the home physiotherapy service. The main purpose of these interviews was to inform the design of the service. Another group of participants was interviewed in the active service stage (Phase 2) - at the beginning and at the end. The purpose here was to gather data from their direct experiences with home physiotherapy. Documents relevant to home rehabilitation were accessed and analysed hermeneutically. These included newspaper media, as it was considered a sensitive instrument to understand social context (Catalán Matamoros 2007; Davis 1990).

Findings and discussion

Data analysis identified categories of findings such as “barriers to the implementation of a new service”, “attitudes to home physiotherapy” and “fragmented rehabilitation service”. The category components were discussed and linked to the hermeneutical analysis of documents, offering a deeper understanding of the categories within the local context, and revealing a reinforcement of establishment-based health care.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provided an insight into the constraints that would appear if home physiotherapy, indeed home rehabilitation, were introduced by the Maltese Public Health Service. This research had an impact on the state physiotherapy services. Recommendations to help mitigate the constraints in an overarching manner were offered at the end of the thesis. To the international reader with experience in organised home physiotherapy, this study gives a glimpse into how issues that would seem trivial and obvious at first glance become significant challenges....challenges that the uninitiated would need to overcome.