



SUPERVISION IN PHYSIOTHERAPY PRACTICE

Physiotherapy New Zealand expects all members to engage in supervision, regardless of the stage of their career, and work settings/contexts. Supervision is continued throughout a physiotherapist's career but the nature and frequency of the supervision relationship will change as the career evolves.

Definition

Supervision is a scheduled time to meet with a respected/experienced professional colleague for the purpose of conducting a reflective review of practice to facilitate the development of the practitioner's competency and knowledge, to discuss professional issues, and to receive feedback on all elements of practice, with the objectives of ensuring consistent quality of service, and patient safety as well providing physiotherapists with a forum for professional growth. Supervision is always accountable to the Standards of Practice and Ethical Codes of the profession.

Guidance

All physiotherapists are expected to participate in supervision. Physiotherapy New Zealand acknowledges the following forms of supervision:

1. Professional (clinical) Supervision

Professional supervision includes the following key elements:

- i. Assistance regarding clinical competence, the enhancement of quality within the organisation, improved accountability and safety, an understanding of administrative functions, the provision of professional oversight.
- ii. Educative functions including developing knowledge, skills and professional/inter-professional learning and understanding; linking the supervisors professional knowledge and education to the supervisees work and helping the development of a professional identity.
- iii. To support and empower the supervisee to manage the emotional aspects of their work and to reflect critically on their work and issues such as: workplace stresses, career progression and to receive feedback and guidance.

2. Cultural (in addition to Professional Supervision, not instead of)

To help the supervisee understands their own culture and how that impacts on their interaction with patients. Cultural supervision is important throughout one's career. This may need to be provided outside of the usual supervision relationship. For Maori physiotherapists Kaupapa supervision may be the most appropriate format.

Process

Supervision involves a negotiated relationship based on a formal agreement between supervisor and supervisee which includes time, place and frequency of meetings. There is an expectation that both parties will abide by the agreed terms in the formal agreement, which is often a written document, to prevent any misunderstandings.

The supervision process should always be supervisee led. As far as practical supervisees should be able to choose their supervisor(s).

Graduates in their first two years of practice making the transition from student to qualified health professional, need to engage in more frequent supervision. It is recommended for new graduates that they have supervision related to their clinical practice provided by a physiotherapist; professional supervision can be provided by either a physiotherapist or it could be someone outside the physiotherapy profession.

As the physiotherapist's career progresses the supervision needs may change and it may be more appropriate to have a supervisor from a different profession.

Professional supervision except in exceptional circumstances must be provided outside of the line management/employer structure to give the physiotherapist an opportunity to reflect on issues such as workload and workplace stresses without feeling there will be repercussions. The purpose of supervision is to ensure the supervisee feels safe and supported in their work and has access to confidential support and advice.

Frequency and Mode

The frequency and mode of supervision may vary according to needs, resources, context, and level of experience, and may incorporate any aspect of professional, cultural or clinical requirements.

The need for supervision is often not recognised for the experienced clinician but supervision is essential for all practitioners to cope with the ongoing stresses facing health professionals.

Expectations of supervisees

The supervisee should look for supervisors who possess sufficient self-awareness, interpersonal competence, and knowledge of processes relevant to the area of practice to assist their career development and professional learning. It is also important the supervisee looks for someone they feel they can trust implicitly who has no ability to directly influence their employment situation. Supervision is always led by the supervisee, who should prepare well so that the sessions focus on the issues they want to bring forward for discussion and guidance.

Expectations of supervisors

It is important when forming the formal supervision agreement that the supervisor's skills and experience meet the needs of the supervisee. When supervision involves the supervisee's clinical practice, this may include having an understanding of the practice context, professional standards, organizational standards and service expectations. The supervisor may have experience of mentoring other colleagues, skills in active listening, leadership or management. A supervisor needs to be caring, empathetic and non judgemental, respect the confidentiality of the information whilst encouraging and guiding the supervisee to grow as a health professional.

It is strongly recommended supervisors attend a training programme prior to commencing their role, and attend refresher courses when available.

Boundaries

The content of the material discussed within the supervision relationship remains confidential to both parties unless issues relating to safety require the confidentiality to be overridden

Supervision must never be confused with counselling. Supervision focuses on the professional 'self' and how that impacts upon and is impacted upon by the work context.

If the nature of the discussion goes beyond the boundaries of the supervision agreement, or the skills of the supervisor, help should be sought from an appropriately qualified person.

In summary

Supervision is a core component of physiotherapy practice; regular participation is strongly recommended as best practice and an expectation for all physiotherapists.

Supporting documents

Aotearoa / New Zealand Physiotherapy Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2011)
Physiotherapy New Zealand Standards of Practice 2012 (Currently waiting for ratification)

*Approved National Executive
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