

Position Statement

Treatment of Whānau and Family Members and Self-Treatment

The Aotearoa New Zealand Physiotherapy Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct states (10.6): “Physiotherapists should avoid treating close family members”

The accompanying commentary states:

“Providing treatment for close family members does not constitute good clinical practice. The potential problems associated with caring for close family members include the possibility that the physiotherapist lacks objectivity, and the presence of family dynamics that may make it difficult for the patient/client to change providers. Some exceptions exist, including: in emergency situations where the patient/client will suffer further harm if care is not provided; or in rural settings where no other suitably qualified provider is available. If funding in these situations is to be sought from a third party, then care must be taken to meet particular criteria regarding verification, documentation and care plans.”

1. The potential problems inherent in treating themselves or whānau and family members include:

- the physiotherapist’s professional judgment may be impaired due to the personal nature of the relationship and can impact on diagnosis and treatment
- the power dynamics present in a whānau and family might make it difficult for the patient to choose an alternative provider and/or make a complaint.

Consequently it is not good clinical practice for physiotherapists to treat themselves or their close whānau and family members unless there is no other available and appropriately qualified physiotherapist. Physiotherapists should exercise great discretion in carrying out any such treatment(s).

Note: The changing nature and composition of familial relationships and concepts of dependency means that this area is highly complex and somewhat controversial. Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ) and the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand consider professional ethics and judgment to be key elements in arriving at a decision on this matter.

2. Where treatment of a close whānau and family member is paid by a third party, there should be a system in place which allows for independent verification, e.g. a referral from a General Practitioner; the expected level of documentation including assessment, diagnosis, treatment/management plan, progress and outcome measures must always be completed regardless of the funding source.

3. Payment should not be claimed from a third party for self-treatment. Physiotherapists should understand and abide by the policies or recommendations of funders regarding remuneration for the treatment of whānau, family members and self