

# The role of clinical supervision in transforming novice physical therapists into compassionate clinicians

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## ABSTRACT

Clinical supervision is a pivotal process in developing beginning physical therapy practitioners into proficient clinicians. Transcending from internee to clinician requires systematic mentoring in order to gain confidence, professional identity, and therapeutic competencies. Physical therapy differs from other medical specialties with standardized diagnostic machines; rather, it is based on the clinical competence of the assessor in diagnosing and treating patients. Successful supervision enhances clinical proficiency alongside empathy, communication, and integrative patient care. However, maximizing supervision of physical therapy education continues to be a challenge. Clinical mentorship helps novice therapists present complex medical concepts in brief and empathetic terms to enhance trainees' as well as instructors' benefits. Successful rehabilitation communication has been linked to enhanced patient outcomes through research. Supervision also facilitates clinical decision-making by integrating evidence-based practice with interdisciplinary practice. Nevertheless, increased reliance on technology and artificial intelligence calls for technology-balancing with real-time mentorship. One of the primary supervision issues is the knowledge gap between supervisors and trainees. The majority of experienced clinicians have not been formally trained in educational techniques, which can undermine the quality of mentorship. Additionally, the rising prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders due to overuse of electronic devices necessitates new clinical knowledge, which needs to be integrated into training. Clinical supervision is crucial for the production of competent physical therapists. Mentorship can also be made more effective by supplementing it with formal training programs for supervisors and incorporating emerging healthcare issues into training. Strengthened clinical supervision will lead to better professional development, evidence-based decision-making, and finally better-quality patient care.

**KEYWORDS:** Clinical supervision; physical therapy education; novice practitioners; professional development; mentorship in healthcare.

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## INTRODUCTION

Clinical supervision is an integral part in the professional development of beginning physical therapists as competent clinicians. The transition from being an internee to a professional practitioner is an important phase that requires structured guidance, mentorship, and practice. Clinical supervision assists beginning therapists in developing basic clinical skills, confidence, and professional identity and increasing their ability to provide holistic patient care.<sup>1</sup> The role of the physical therapist in healthcare is unique in that it is extremely reliant on the clinician's skills to assess and diagnose patients regardless of routine laboratory tests. Most of the patients who receive physical therapy are those with chronic diseases that not only affect their



physical condition but also their mental well-being. Successful mentorship is therefore essential in equipping future clinicians with skills to offer holistic and empathetic care.<sup>2</sup>

This editorial article addresses the place of clinical supervision in physical therapy education, promoting its benefit in communication, clinical decision-making, and readiness for evolving healthcare challenges. It also addresses the following challenges faced during clinical supervision: a call for more pedagogical training for mentors, and provides implications to optimize the most significant aspects of professional development for physical therapy.

## DISCUSSION

Clinical supervision is the foundation of shaping a novice practitioner into a proficient clinician. Becoming an internee to clinician is a vital process in healthcare. Effective clinical supervision plays a key role in shaping physical therapy novices into competent and skilled professionals through confidence building, professional identity, and incorporation of therapeutic knowledge.<sup>3</sup> While clinical skills are paramount, integrating teaching into clinical practice is imperative in fostering empathy, enhancing communication, and delivering holistic patient care. This editorial analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of clinical supervision for physical therapy students and provides recommendations on how to maximize this process of redemption.

The contribution of physical therapy in medicine is well established. Unlike other medical specialties that rely on the use of standardized examination tools such as laboratory tests and ancillary procedures, physical therapy requires a large number of physical tests that are applied solely by the examiner. The clinical experience and ability of the assessor contribute significantly to ensuring a proper diagnosis, which ultimately leads to appropriate treatment. Physical therapy clients are typically chronically ill and not just is their physical well-being compromised, but their emotional health is also compromised. A clinical mentor has the responsibility to enlighten novice practitioners to this complexity. With their experience and expertise, mentors facilitate such practitioners to gain competencies that will see them provide patient-centered care according to one's needs.

Clinical supervision encourages novice therapists to articulate complex clinical concepts simply and empathetically. This interactive process benefits the students as well as makes the teacher stronger in order to deal effectively with patients.<sup>4</sup> As per the study conducted by C. Becker et al. (2021), successful communication has a positive correlation with improved patient outcomes and patient satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Physical rehabilitation requires a multidisciplinary model, and incorporating additional specialists at the right time is critical to the production of enhanced clinical outcomes. Mentorship solidifies the core principles of clinical decision-making by emphasizing what a patient is capable of accomplishing and how they can accomplish it with the help of various rehabilitation specialties. Engaging in clinical mentorship broadens practitioners' perspectives by keeping them current with the latest available evidence. In spite of enhanced application of artificial intelligence in healthcare, real-time mentorship is irreplaceable, considering patient care involves an advanced process from assessment to discharge planning.

The increased use of mobile electronic devices and the development of artificial intelligence-based machines have influenced the musculoskeletal system, leading to postural disorders. These new conditions can only be managed through intelligent

solutions by keeping clinicians' knowledge current from the beginning of practice. Clinical mentorship is key in reminding the clinician's knowledge base through sensitization to these new problems.

Educators who are formerly therapists are most likely to be mentors who shape the professional self of their students. This mentorship teaches lifelong learning and ethics of practice that are essential to professionalism. The transmission of formal knowledge allows for the development of foundation competencies that equip novice physical therapists to perform adequately in dynamic real-world practice.<sup>6</sup> Good clinical supervision encompasses several key components, such as the creation of a collaborative, trust-based working relationship between supervisee and supervisor, the establishment of clear goal and expectation setting, and a reflective practice environment. Structured feedback sessions on a regular basis enable supervisors to support inexperienced practitioners with areas for improvement, to develop clinical reasoning, and to develop an increased appreciation of the nuances of physical therapy practice.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most significant challenges in the delivery of effective clinical supervision of physical therapy is filling the potential knowledge gap between supervisors and supervisees. Studies suggested that even though most clinical supervisors are keen and enthusiastic about their duties, they are not well-informed in education principles and teaching strategies.<sup>8</sup> In bridging this divide, healthcare organizations and education institutions need to provide strong training and professional development for clinical supervisors, which will prepare them with pedagogical capacities and skills to mentor and facilitate novice practitioners effectively.<sup>9</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Clinical supervision is essential to shaping physical therapy internees into empathetic clinicians. By maximizing the strengths of teaching and minimizing its pitfalls in clinical practice, we can shape a new generation of physical therapists who believe in empathy and are adept at effective communication. With continued developments in medical education, there is the necessity to integrate teaching into clinical practice smoothly so that the professionals not only treat patients effectively but also develop personal relationships with them.

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None

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

We have no conflict of interest

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