



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

Association
canadienne de
physiothérapie

Position Statement

Conflict of Interest

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) asserts that physiotherapists must not enter into situations of conflict of interest which could influence the performance of professional duties to the detriment of the client. Physiotherapists must maintain the highest standards of professionalism and personal professional responsibility, adhering to the CPA Code of Ethics and superseding at all times any personal gain - be it a benefit, financial remuneration, rebate, or commission.

DEFINITION

A conflict of interest arises when the physiotherapist “benefits or has the appearance of benefiting personally from his or her actions. The concept includes conflicts that are actual, possible or perceived.”¹ As professionals, physiotherapists have a conflict of interest when their commitments or interests compromise their independent judgment and/or client care.

BACKGROUND

Physiotherapists assess clients' health concerns and problems and recommend treatments. Payment for the performed treatment – which may come from a provincial health plan, the client or a third party – is how the practitioner earns his/her living.

A conflict of interest exists when the physiotherapist's judgment or actions are or could be perceived to be influenced by personal gain. In a situation of conflict of interest, it is the physiotherapist's responsibility to disclose this conflict to the client, offer the client the choice of proceeding or not with the proposed activity, and receive client approval prior to initiating and/or continuing treatment. Full disclosure and client consent must also be obtained when referring the client to another health care professional or providing them with a service, product or program. Physiotherapists must comply with provincial legislation related to conflict of interest.

Circumstances where perceived or actual conflict of interest might exist include but are not limited to the following:

- physiotherapy treatment is provided solely for financial gain rather than for the benefit of the client

¹ Health Professions Licensing Authority. Conflict of Interest Policy. Available at:

http://www.nt.gov.au/health/org_supp/prof_boards/general_policies/Conflict%20of%20Interest%20Policy.pdf. Accessed January 10, 2007.

- a physiotherapist benefits financially or otherwise as a condition of client referral other than for the delivery of services
- a physiotherapist enters into an agreement where calculation of their lease or return on investments is based in any way on patient volume, clinic time, or other comparable arrangement
- a physiotherapist sells a product or equipment that is not recommended or needed for client treatment

Best practice dictates that physiotherapists consider the client's preference of supplier when recommending purchase of a physiotherapy-related product or when making a referral to another health care professional, facility or program.

Conflict of interest may be unavoidable in certain situations, for example, in rural or under serviced regions where a family member or client requires treatment that only the physiotherapist in question is qualified to provide. In these instances, to deny necessary health care services to the client because a conflict of interest exists would be counter-productive and of greater harm to the client than the alternative.

CONCLUSION

Professional integrity and the public's view of the physiotherapy profession are jeopardized when a physiotherapist enters into conflict of interest situations. When faced with a potential or actual conflict, CPA looks to each of its members to comply with the CPA Code of Ethics and act with integrity, accountability and good judgment in the best interests of the client, society and the profession. CPA is committed to supporting the ethical practice of all members.

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