

## LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

### **Investing in Community-based Physiotherapy: the Non-economic Benefits**

In continuation of the theme of an article (Rajan, 2014) published in issue No.1, Volume 25 of Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development, this seeks to highlight the non-economic benefits of community-based physiotherapy, which are less tangible but more relevant to the health of underprivileged communities. Although published research on community physiotherapy in developing countries is sparse (Rajan, in press), the non-economic benefits of the same cannot be underestimated.

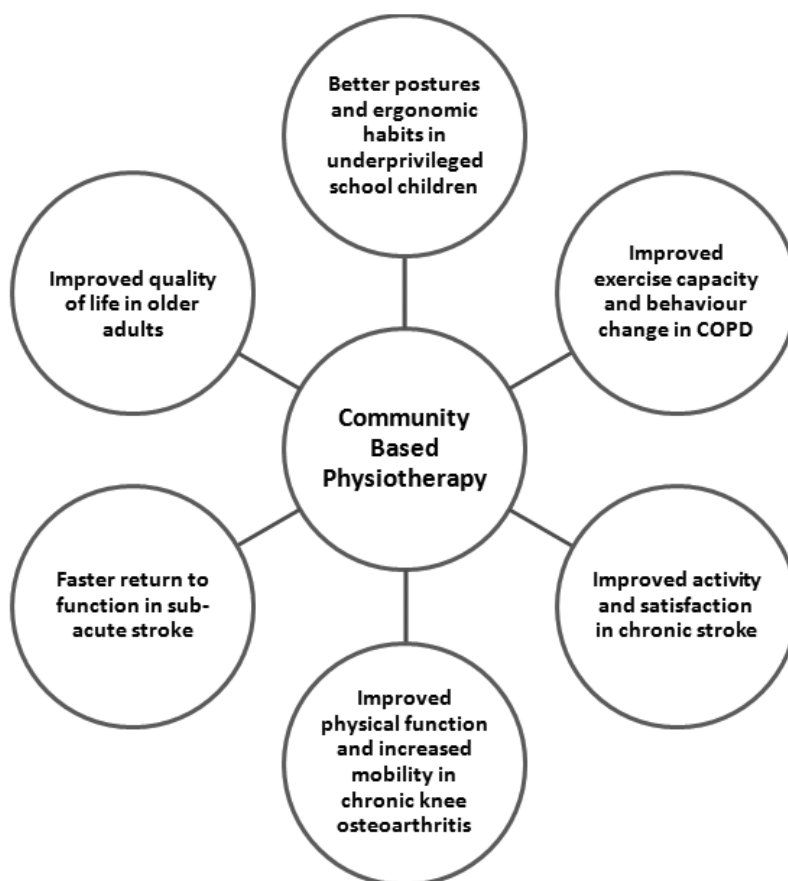
The beneficial effects of community-based physiotherapy are contingent upon the client population that is being treated (see Figure 1). In the study by Effing et al (2011) on 153 clients with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) in the Netherlands, improved exercise capacity and improved exercise behaviour were reported after one year of community-based physiotherapeutic treatment. In another study by community physiotherapists in the United States (Sullivan et al, 2014), the use of pedometers for 6 weeks enhanced satisfaction and improved activity in chronic stroke clients. Physiotherapy intervention through workshops and postural training for the community of underprivileged school children in India proved beneficial in fostering better ergonomics and postures (Rajan and Koti, 2013a). Improved physical function, reduced pain, increased flexibility and range of motion at the hip and knee were reported by chronic osteoarthritic clients in the United Kingdom, following a 12-month community aquatic rehabilitation (Lin et al, 2004). One of the most beneficial aspects of incorporating community-based physiotherapy into a client's treatment regimen is "intervention in the living environment" (Lord et al, 2008). This ensures faster return-to-function as the client receives the treatment in the same environment where she/he resides (Park et al, 2011). A similar community programme involving graded muscle-strengthening exercises for community-dwelling older adults in Bangladesh improved their quality of life, including strength, balance and gait (Nallathambi, 2012).

Community-based physiotherapy has been used with promising results among varied client populations across the globe. Innovative techniques have also been employed in resource- constrained countries like India (Rajan and Koti, 2013b) and Bangladesh (Ellangovin, 2009). This has not only ensured sustainability of

the new community model but also affordability for the target communities. Such models, that have been tailored and developed to suit the communities being treated, have demonstrated long-lasting effects. Due to this, better health outcomes have been achieved despite the chronicity of health conditions (see Figure 1).

However, despite the various beneficial effects and innovations to ensure sustainability, community-based physiotherapy has always been plagued by one persistent issue: lack of qualified staff (Ellangovin, 2009; Christian Medical College, 2010; Rajan, 2013). Attempts have been made to tackle this problem, by skill transference to the local staff/volunteers in the communities. This has ensured increased participation and continued treatment (Ellangovin, 2009; Christian Medical College, 2010).

**Figure 1: The Non-economic Benefits of Community-based Physiotherapy**



It can thus be concluded that community-based physiotherapy has many beneficial effects, such as improved function, higher levels of satisfaction with treatment and better quality of life, among others. Attempts have been made in a few countries to tailor the community programmes to ensure sustainability and feasibility. Such innovations could ensure longer-lasting effects.

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