

Physio students: *we need* more not less

Physiotherapy is integral to delivering the NHS Five-Year Forward View. Timely access to physiotherapy alleviates pressure on parts of the system under the most strain – GPs, accident & emergency and social care. It prevents and reverses disability, allowing people to regain maximum levels of mobility, function, independence and fitness for work.

As the population ages, works longer and is managing more long term conditions, the need for physiotherapy rises.

There is a current shortfall in physiotherapists. A survey of physiotherapy managers in 2015 revealed widespread difficulties in recruitment. CSP workforce modelling shows that an additional 500 physiotherapy student places a year are needed to keep pace with changing population needs.

The Chancellor announced in the Spending Review a ten thousand increase in student places for allied health professions (of which physiotherapy is the largest), nursing and midwifery by 2020.

There is no shortage of people wanting to be physios – with more than 12 applicants for each place. 97% complete the course and there is a high translation of graduates into practising physios.

30% of GP workload relates to musculoskeletal problems, conditions physios are trained to deal with. Physiotherapists are cheaper and quicker to train

than doctors and, unlike physicians associates, are trained to work without supervision and are fully regulated.

Cuts planned to physiotherapy student numbers 2016/17

HEE's investment and commissioning plan for 2016/17 cuts physiotherapy student commissions for the next academic year by 104 places (6.7%). This flies in the face of evidence about demand and need. It will exacerbate current staffing shortages. It undermines the ability to deliver the Five Year Forward View for patients and the ambition to increase physiotherapy student numbers by 2020.

As well as misjudging the numbers of physios that the NHS will need, HEE explicitly ignores the workforce needs of independent health providers contracted by the NHS, social care providers, the Ministry of Defense, occupational health services and sports.

Moving from bursaries to self-funding from 2017/18

● *Potential to increase training places*

If there is a move away from bursaries it is critical that this is done in a way which explicitly increases the number of physiotherapy student places to meet service demands.

If it does the CSP will support a change. We look to the Government to make explicit commitments to increase physiotherapy training places, but have concerns in light of the HEE planned cuts in 2016-17.

● *Funding practice education*

In the new arrangements HEE is expected to continue to fund practice education. How this is done urgently needs to be reviewed.

There needs to be a level playing field in allocation of funding for placements across all the professions. Steps also need to be taken to ensure that the funding reaches the services providing the placements.

A lack of support for practice education will work against increasing the supply of physiotherapists and meeting the overall target to increase health care student numbers by ten thousand in the next four years.

● *Entry to the physiotherapy profession*

Entry to the physiotherapy profession by individuals from all parts of society must be upheld, so that the profession is representative of the populations it serves.

In particular, changes to funding for physiotherapy education need to include steps to mitigate any impact on mature, part-time students and second degree/postgraduate entrants to the profession.

Many students, including physiotherapy support workers, will need to work part time while they are studying. The additional costs attached to being a health care student must be recognised and addressed through fair student finance arrangements.

What can you do?

Ask the Secretary of State for Health to

- **Intervene** to stop the cut in student physio places for 2016/17
- **Require a review** of how HEE funds practice education so that the much needed expansion of physiotherapy places is enabled rather than held back
- **Direct HEE** to consider workforce needs across sectors
- **Commit** to taking measures to ensure entry to the profession by mature and part-time students.