

# Teaching and training carers during the COVID-19 pandemic

## A briefing from the CSP

As the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK progresses there will be a shift in the focus of work carried out by physiotherapy staff from supporting critical lifesaving care to the rehabilitation of those who have recovered.

A core part of physiotherapy practice in the context of rehabilitation involves supporting and empowering people who undertake formal or informal caring responsibilities to provide care to those recovering from illness or injury. This is in order to enhance the physical function, emotional well-being and overall comfort of the individuals for whom they care.

By carer we mean the full range of people who undertake caring responsibilities. I.e. family members, friends, social and private sector carers and those working in supported living, residential and nursing home environments.

Working with carers is a particularly important approach for physiotherapy staff in order to support individuals who due to their physical or cognitive limitations may not be able to work on self-management strategies alone.

Physiotherapists and physiotherapy support workers provide this support by either:

- Delegating tasks or activities to named carers as part of an individual's on going physiotherapy treatment episode.
- Delivering training to upskill carers to work support the provision of rehabilitation with individuals or cohorts of people who have particular healthcare needs.

It is never appropriate to ask carers to undertake interventions that should only be carried out by trained healthcare staff. However, during the social distancing and shielding requirements of COVID-19, supporting carers to carry out tasks and activities that they can safely provide is a sensible approach to minimise face to face contacts.

In addition during COVID-19, we expect to see an increasing need to delegate to and teach and train carers. This in order to meet high demand for physiotherapy, functional rehabilitation and optimise the impact of the physiotherapy workforce's knowledge and skill.

There are differences in these approaches in terms of the accountability and responsibility for the interventions provided. Concerns about responsibility and accountability are often a barrier to efficient working practices.

We therefore outline three scenarios to clarify these issues and in order to support physiotherapy staff and carers to work confidently in these ways.

In addition we recommend that local services develop information for carers which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all involved; basic advice and instruction on what has been taught and includes who to contact and when if they have questions or concerns.

## **1. Delegation of physiotherapy tasks and responsibilities to a carer as part of a physiotherapy treatment episode**

### **- Responsibility and accountability of the delegating registered healthcare professional**

The delegating registered healthcare professional retains overall responsibility for the episode of physiotherapy and is accountable for their decision to delegate aspects of a treatment programme to a carer.

In being accountable for a decision to delegate, the registered healthcare professional should be sure of the following:

- ✓ Is the decision to delegate to a carer in the best interests of the patient? Delegation should not occur because a suitable registered healthcare professional is not available to undertake the activity.
- ✓ How complex is the task and what is the context in which the task is to be delegated? They should consider, for **this** patient, presenting in **this way** at **this point** in time, needing **this intervention** is it appropriate for a carer to undertake the task?
- ✓ Is the carer competent and confident to undertake the task? Do they have the necessary knowledge, skills and training? Can both the registered professional and the carer evidence this competence if required?

- ✓ Is there a system in place for the carer to contact a registered healthcare professional if required and to discuss the outcome of the delegated task?

- **Responsibility and accountability of the carer**

The carer is responsible for accepting the delegated tasks to them. They are also accountable for ensuring that they are competent and confident to carry it out and the right systems and processes are in place to support them.

The carer is accountable for their decisions and actions when carrying out the task once it has been delegated to them.

We recommend both parties keep records of what has been taught and delegated and of the support systems and processes in place.

## **2. Delegation of physiotherapy tasks and responsibilities from a physiotherapy support worker to a carer as part of a physiotherapy treatment episode**

- **Responsibility and accountability of the registered healthcare professional managing the support worker**

The registered healthcare professional retains overall responsibility for the episode of physiotherapy and is accountable for their decision to delegate aspects of a treatment programme to a support worker, including the authority to allow further delegation of aspects of a programme to a carer by the support worker.

The registered healthcare professional is accountable for ensuring the support worker is trained and competent to further delegate activities safely and appropriately to carers.

- **Responsibility and accountability of the support worker delegating to a carer**

The support worker is responsible for undertaking those tasks delegated to them with appropriate skill. Where the support worker decides to further delegate activities to carers the support worker should be sure of the following:

- ✓ Is the decision to delegate to a carer in the best interests of the patient?  
Delegation should not occur because suitably trained healthcare staff are not available.

- ✓ How complex is the task and what is the context in which the task is to be delegated? They should consider, for **this** patient, presenting in **this way** at **this point** in time, needing **this intervention** is it appropriate for a carer to undertake the task?
  - ✓ Is the carer competent and confident to undertake the task? Do they have the necessary knowledge, skills and training? Can both the registered professional and the carer evidence this competence if required?
  - ✓ Is there a system in place for the carer to contact the support worker or other suitably trained staff if required and to discuss the outcome of the delegated task?
- **Responsibilities and accountability of the carer**

The carer is responsible for undertaking those tasks delegated to them in accordance with the plans of the healthcare worker. The carer is accountable for accepting the delegated task, and for accepting that they are competent and confident to carry it out, and the right systems and processes are in place to support them.

The carer is accountable for their decisions and actions when carrying out the task once it has been delegated to them.

We recommend both parties keep records of what has been taught and delegated and of the support systems and processes in place.

### **3. Teaching, training and upskilling of carers to support with enabling and rehabilitative approaches to care**

- **Responsibility and accountability of the trainer**

The trainer is responsible and accountable for the safety, accuracy and currency of the content they teach. Content should include clear parameters for discontinuation of tasks and activities; escalation of any concerns to a registered healthcare professional and limits to practice.

A trainer is responsible for ensuring that those participating in training are assessed as competent in the tasks, activities and responsibilities they have been taught, at the point the training was delivered.

A trainer is not responsible or accountable for the carer's individual practice thereafter.

We recommend trainers keep a register of who they have trained and what they deem individuals competent to undertake at each teaching touch point.

- **Responsibility and accountability of carers**

Carers are responsible and accountable for carrying out the tasks and activities in which they have been assessed as competent, safely and appropriately and not beyond the level at which they have been trained and educated.

Carers are responsible for ensuring they maintain the skills acquired during initial training which may include undertaking periodical refresher training

Carers are accountable for the decisions and actions they take in practice when undertaking the tasks and activities they have been trained to carry out. This includes not undertaking tasks and activities if they feel unconfident or that they do not have the necessary skill.

Cares are responsible for escalating concerns about their competence and seeking support with reviewing or refreshing their knowledge and skills.

## References

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy; 2013. Duty of care. Available from: <http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/duty-care>

Health & Care Professions Council; 2016. Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. Available from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/>

Health and Care Professions Council; 2016. Standards of Proficiency – Physiotherapists. Available from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/standards/standards-of-proficiency-physiotherapists/>

For further guidance on Accountability and Delegation see our full paper <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/supervision-accountability-delegation-activities-support-workers-guide-registered>