PHYSIOTHERAPY PROVISION IN VIEW OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ZIMBABWE

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zimbabwe Physiotherapy Association is alive to its effect on physiotherapists, patients and the country at large.

The association urges all stakeholders to follow established World Health Organization and National Guidelines on infection control and mitigation of the spread of the virus. Whilst the association appreciates the diversity of physiotherapy work environments, to ensure the safety of our therapists and clients we urge both parties to take cues from the global experiences thus far.

Precaution in the Practice.

As health care providers, our foremost responsibility is to ensure our safety and that of everyone in our care; patients, staff members, visitors to our facilities, our families by minimizing the risk of Coronavirus infection, through executing the established global and national guidelines. Physiotherapists maintain close physical contact with patients during treatment and a significant proportion of clients with high risk of contracting Covid-19 are our regular clients. Prudent decisions on the end value of treatments, compared to the risk of exposure for practitioner and patient therefore have to be made. The sure mediatory way is “TO STAY AT HOME “for all, but for those who deem it necessary to continue with patient treatments presently, we proffer these guidelines:

IN THE PRACTICE.

Display a clear warning to your patients at the entrance of or within your waiting area informing symptomatic patients (cough, fever, runny nose, sore throat, flu like symptoms) that they should contact their GP rather than come for physiotherapy. Furthermore we urge adherence to the national COVID-19 protocols.

Limit the number of patients /persons who are simultaneously in your waiting room. Ensure the recommended social distance.

Request patients to disinfect/ sanitize their hands, on entering and exiting the practice.
Don’t allow unnecessary patient companions in the waiting room or treatment area, only one companion where necessary.

Ensure staff compliance with essential hygiene measures within the practice.

Disinfect electronic payment terminals and therapeutic equipment in between patients.

Allow your patients to bring their own protective equipment and sanitizer, provided you verify their validity.

Educate your patients on the importance of physical activity during self-isolation, social distancing and/or quarantine, and possible ways to continue with prescribed exercise programs.

Consider the use of electronic platforms (WhatsApp, Skype, FaceTime etc.) to guide patients at home.

**IN THE HOSPITALS.**

Provision of PPE to the physiotherapist by employers and admitting health facility authorities, fitting to the patient’s condition and during physiotherapy treatment is paramount, failure of which the physiotherapist may defer service until such time as when risk of Covid-19 is impractical.

The physiotherapist shall, on ensuing visits to the admitting facility, proceed to treat a patient as long as they remain clinically excluded as a Covid-19 patient by their doctor’s clinical observations with clinical files indicating such.

The physiotherapist should be part of the clinical decision making over the appropriateness of continuing treatment of patients requiring in particular respiratory/ chest physiotherapy in view of Covid 19 risks.

**IN GENERAL, AND TO THE EMPLOYERS AND MINISTRY OF HEALTH.**

Physiotherapists employed in private, public and other services must be included in government, private sector and or international organization originated healthcare personnel Covid-19 activities. This includes training, counseling and resource provision that enables them to provide best practice service towards management of the Zimbabwean chapter of the pandemic.

These are unfamiliar, unusual times. Still the Zimbabwe Physiotherapy Association asserts that the responsibility for the good health of the nation in the wake of the Covid -19 pandemic is everyone’s responsibility. Let us make informed, timely and collectively responsible decisions to preserve life and beyond that a quality leader life.