



FOR PROFESSIONALS
SINCE 1941

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTING A REPUTABLE PHYSIOTHERAPIST

06 March 2013: Research indicated that 80% of people will experience back pain at some stage in their lifetime, according to the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP), with the result that finding a reliable physiotherapist is becoming increasingly important for most South Africans.

This is according to Dr Dominique Stott, Executive of Medical Standards and Services at PPS, who says professionals that work in an office for long periods of time are especially at risk of back pain developing into a debilitating problem. “Long hours of sitting in a stationary position combined with stress and a bad workstation setup can result in severe strain being placed on the neck and back. In fact, back pain is now the second leading cause for consumers to visit their doctor.”

“While some office workers may only experience mildly inconvenient back, neck and wrist soreness, some chronic conditions such as repetitive strain injury (RSI) or carpal tunnel syndrome can develop over time,” says Dr Stott.

Many consumers suffering from back pain may seek out the service of a physiotherapist to relieve the pain, however it is imperative that they ensure the physiotherapist they select is qualified and reputable to avoid the dangers of ineffective treatment or unethical practice, says Dr Stott.

According to Samantha Dunbar, the chairperson of PhysioFocus representing private physiotherapists within the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP), word-of-mouth from a trusted source or a referral from a healthcare practitioner is a good way to find a reliable physiotherapist.

“However, when using the services of a physiotherapist for the first time consumers have the right to request to see the physiotherapist’s qualifications if they are not openly displayed in the waiting room. In order for a physiotherapist to be qualified, a four year full-time Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy or Bachelor of Physiotherapy is the minimum requirement, or a Diploma in Physiotherapy that is recognised by the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA).”

Dunbar says consumers can also ask to see proof of registration with the HPCSA. “This is a compulsory annual requirement which proves that the physiotherapist has attended approximately 30 hours of continuous professional development activities per year and also adheres to ethical rules and policies that ultimately protect the consumer.”

Another association registration consumers can look out for, is the SASP which is a voluntary professional body that represents South African physiotherapists and provides malpractice and public liability insurance, education and information to its members, says Dunbar. “The SASP also ensures its members practice ethically and legally through an accreditation program and conducts an internal peer review process should a complaint be lodged against a member.”

Dunbar says physiotherapists are first line practitioners and can therefore diagnose and treat patients without a referral. “They treat a wide variety of conditions including sport injuries, headache, pain relief, chest conditions, chronic pain, following surgery e.g. hip replacement, back surgery, neurology, burns units, schools for disabled and special needs children, even animals, to name only a few. Sportspeople tend to use the services of a physiotherapist on a regular basis for sport injuries with professional sports teams having a dedicated physiotherapist in attending.”

Once a patient, people tend to go back for future treatments, says Dunbar. “Therefore it is important to find a reputable physiotherapist from the start in order to avoid financial or health-related consequences.”

Consumers can find a reputable physiotherapist in their area by visiting the SASP website on www.physiosa.org.za and using the “Find a Physio” service. The website will provide information regarding special fields of interest, which will assist the patient in looking for a physiotherapist for a specific condition in a specific province and area. The public is also welcome to email Mansur Cloete, the President of the SASP at president@saphysio.co.za or Samantha Dunbar at nec_privatesector@saphysio.co.za for more information.

“With physiotherapy being used to treat a wide variety of medical conditions, the likelihood of South Africans seeking out the services of a physiotherapist has increased. As a result, it is imperative to ensure the physiotherapist they select is reputable to ensure their problem is treated effectively in order to be restored to good health,” concludes Dr Stott.