

Empathy in the Work of Physiotherapists in Slovakia

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Abstract : Based on common practice, we know that an empathic approach to a patient is one of the characteristics of a physiotherapist. Although empathy is regarded as an essential condition of the psychotherapeutic relationship, it has taken quite a while for attention to be paid to it in clinical practice. Patients who are experiencing a sense of understanding from health care providers are more willing to cooperate, and treatment within the optimistic attunes a more comfortable framework of care. Age, experience, family, education and the working environment may have an impact on the degree of empathy for paramedics. Within the KEGA project no. 003KU-4-2021, we decided to investigate the level of empathy in the work of physiotherapists in Slovakia. Research sample and Methods: The sample comprised 194 respondents – physiotherapists working on the territory of Slovakia. 112 were men and 82 women. The age of respondents was between 21 and 64 years of age. 133 were married, 51 were single and ten were divorced. 98 were living in the countryside and 96 in towns. Twenty-two grew up without siblings, 95 with one sibling and 77 with two and more siblings. In the survey, we used the Empathy Assessment Questionnaire (EAQ) with 18 questions with four possible answers: strongly disagree, disagree, agree; and strongly agree, which we validated linguistically and psychometrically. All data were statistically processed by SPSS 25. Results: We evaluated the intrinsic reliability of the questionnaire EAQ using Cronbach's Alpha and the coefficient is 0.756 in the whole set. This means that the questionnaire is a quite strong and reliable measurement tool. The mean for individual questions ranged from 2.39 to 3.74 (maximum was 4). In Pearson's correlations, we confirmed the significant differences between the groups regarding sex in 8 questions out of 18, regarding age in 5 questions, regarding family status in 4 questions and regarding siblings in 4 questions out of 18 at the level 5% ($p < 0.05$). Conclusion: The results obtained during the research show the importance of adequate communication with the patient due to his health and well-being. Empathy in the physiotherapists' profession is very important. It would be worthwhile if the students of physiotherapy would receive a course during their study that would deal exclusively with empathy, empathic approach, burnout, or psycho-emotional hygiene.

Keywords : empathy, approach, clinical practice, physiotherapists

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