Clinical education primer
Demonstrated benefits for clinician and student

Succession planning is key to the ongoing success of any business. Along with ensuring there are enough people to sustain the organization, this planning generates a "talent pool" for key positions, and provides learning and development opportunities for individuals to accelerate leadership growth. These factors are also important considerations for professions: who will replace professionals clinically and where will the profession's leaders come from?

For the physiotherapy profession, succession planning means providing the highest quality of education—both academic and clinical—for future physiotherapists and physiotherapist support personnel. And while the academic programs are responsible for the academic component, important components of a professional education can only be gained through clinical placements. Along with manual handling skills development, clinical practice hours help students develop skills in "critical thinking" and "task analysis". These attributes are essential to the daily role and skill set of a competent practicing physiotherapist and physiotherapist support personnel.

Clinical education opportunities in both public and private sectors are essential to maintain high quality in entry-level competency for the physiotherapy profession. Notwithstanding this fact, as enrollment has increased in some PT programs, over the last 12 years clinical offerings have decreased.

Physiotherapists engaged in the provision of clinical education regard the development of future professionals as a professional responsibility and/or become involved because of worksite specific recommendations. And there is a growing recognition that there is a "value added" benefit for the preceptor in this relationship and learning opportunity.

The benefits to clinicians of physiotherapy clinical education opportunities

Research—and practice—shows that physiotherapists who participate in clinical education experience the following kinds of personal and professional development:

- Stimulation of clinical reasoning and reflective practice skills
- Ongoing development of professional skills, e.g., time management and priority setting and
- The opportunity to bring new theories and current thinking into the workplace.

In addition, there is evidence that productivity is not affected. In fact, there is an increase or at least no decrease in productivity.

Client satisfaction is also unaffected—it remains equally high when receiving services from students in a therapist-student pair as when receiving services from PT alone.

Flexible models for clinical education opportunities

As healthcare models evolve and demand increased flexibility, models for clinical education and preceptorship have also evolved. In addition to the most commonly known model, where the student to preceptor ratio is 1:1, other models have varying levels of supervision that provide opportunity for different skills development. For example, with the collaborative model (2:1 ratio) students can consult with each other and the role of the clinician changes to more of a resource. In the split model (1:2 ratio) students are exposed to more than one therapist style and part-time physiotherapists can participate in clinical education opportunities as well.

Resources to assist clinicians

Physiotherapists interested in exploring the professional opportunities clinical education offers can take advantage of the resources provided by the 14 physiotherapy education programs in Canada. Some programs offer web-based clinician resources such as giving or receiving feedback, tips for supervision of students, and dealing with conflict.

As members of a profession looking to its growth and development, clinicians are encouraged to offer, or continue to offer placements in both the private and public sectors. It is vital that optimal learning for the future physiotherapy profession is sustained and the high level of entry-level competency is maintained. Flexible models, resources for clinicians and the research identifying the benefits to clinicians all support the role of clinical education in succession planning for the profession.

References
4. Neale Andrew. 10 reasons for you to make students an offer they can't refuse! OT Now, March/April 2003, p. 9-9.