

## A STUDY OF CURTIN PHYSIOTHERAPY GRADUATES 2000-2004

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### INTRODUCTION

Within healthcare, multidisciplinary models continue to grow. They rely on a sufficient workforce in all professions to ensure effective management of medical practitioner's patients. Physiotherapy is the largest contributor to healthcare after nursing and medicine<sup>1</sup>, therefore it is important to understand the dynamic employment characteristics of the profession.

Few recent studies have examined the extent to which health professionals may become dissatisfied and leave their professions, and much evidence is anecdotal<sup>2-6</sup>. As Australia continues to experience a shortage of many healthcare workers including physiotherapists,<sup>7-9</sup> factors influencing professional satisfaction levels need to be identified and managed appropriately.

With retirement and employment growth, Generation Y as a whole is predicted to occupy 40% of the general labour force within five years.<sup>10</sup> They have enormous potential to influence employment trends.

### OBJECTIVES

- Explore the workforce trends for recent physiotherapy graduates
- Establish satisfaction levels and motivating factors for employment
- Determine graduates' future career intentions and how many remain in the physiotherapy profession up to five years after graduation
- Discuss the implications of the above for the physiotherapy profession and wider health workforce

### DESIGN, SETTING, PARTICIPANTS

- Study conducted in Perth, Western Australia.
- Self-administered questionnaire sent to 407 contactable graduates from Curtin University of Technology's School of Physiotherapy Graduates 2000-2004 (of 436 total graduates).
- Response rate achieved = 63%
- Descriptive statistics, chi square and qualitative text analysis utilised in analysing results.

### RESULTS

#### PROFILE OF A RECENT PHYSIOTHERAPY GRADUATE

- 68% female
- Mean age 28 years ±3.9; range 23-43 years
- Majority work in major Australian cities (8% rural Australia, 13% overseas)
- 76% work full-time with average 39 hours worked per week
- 92% working as clinicians
- 55% working in private sector; 45% public sector
- 62% spending some time in Musculoskeletal physiotherapy
- 50% Australian Physiotherapy Association members
- 45% completed 10-50 hours of professional development in 2006
- 31% undertaking or completed Post Graduate study

#### FUTURE WORKFORCE PREDICTORS

- 15% inactive in physiotherapy (unemployed, working in another profession, studying full-time, on extended leave)
- 25% believed they would be in the physiotherapy profession for 20+ years, whilst 65% believed they would leave the profession within 10 years
- Most likely reason for leaving the workforce
  - Family commitments (27%)
  - Change of career (25%)
  - Retirement from workforce (10%)

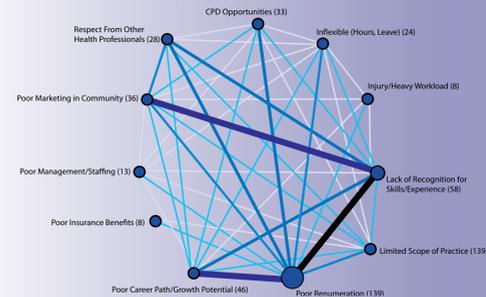
#### Who was significantly more satisfied with work as a physiotherapist? (p < 0.05)

	% satisfied	N
Working rurally	85	17
Australian Physiotherapy Association members	83	105
>100 hrs Professional Development in 2006	85	22
Seniors in public sector	86	42
Principals in private sector	90	18

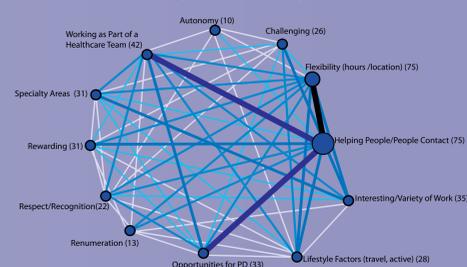
#### Which physiotherapists earned significantly greater salaries? (p<0.05)

	Salary pa (\$AUD)	%	N
Working rurally	>\$65K	60	12
Males	>\$75K	27	22
Private Sector	>\$75K	23	28
Principals in Private Sector	> \$65K	85	17
Seniors in Public Sector	> \$65K	65	32
>100 hrs Professional Development in 2006	>\$75K	31	8

#### Major areas for improvement in physiotherapy



#### Best aspects of working in physiotherapy



### CONCLUSIONS

#### LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

- Sample limited to Curtin University School of Physiotherapy Graduates - Further similar studies could be conducted with wider age groups; state-wide; nation-wide; in other health professions.
- The response rate achieved was above accepted thresholds for self-administered questionnaires<sup>11,12</sup>; and was higher than previous physiotherapy workforce studies<sup>13-15</sup>.
- Only 10% respondents were born before 1975 (falling outside the Generation Y age group). They were not excluded from the study as they were still considered 'Generation Y trained' physiotherapists.

#### CONCLUSION

- Just a quarter of respondents indicated a long-term career in physiotherapy. Given current healthcare shortages, data such as this has massive implications for the future workforce.
- The most satisfied recent physiotherapy graduates had defined a career path by achieving senior status, and took a greater active interest in the profession undertaking more professional development and holding professional association membership. Physiotherapists also demanded workplace flexibility, rewards (both extrinsic and intrinsic), recognition for skills and a structured, achievable career path.
- This study highlights issues to be considered by health employers, managers, educators and government bodies to recruit and retain Generation Y health employees in the workforce.

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