PRIORITIZATION STRATEGIES OF PERSONS WITH MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN FOR OUTPATIENT PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES IN QUEBEC

Simon Deslauriers, M.Pht, MSc. Candidate
Université Laval
Student/Trainee

INTRODUCTION / AIM
Physiotherapy helps improve the functional status and quality of life of persons experiencing pain. However, access to public physiotherapy services for persons with musculoskeletal pain has been steadily decreasing in Canada due to limited financial and human resources. Referral prioritization is a commonly used strategy to attempt to manage waiting lists, but its specific use in the context of physiotherapy services has received little attention. The objective of this study was to describe prioritization strategies used to manage referrals to public outpatient physiotherapy services in the province of Quebec.

METHODS
A survey combining telephone and online data collection was conducted in all of Quebec’s publicly funded hospitals that provide outpatient musculoskeletal physiotherapy (n=100).

RESULTS
Ninety-eight percent of sites responded to the survey. Referral prioritization was used by 96% of sites. The majority of sites (65%) prioritized referrals based on state of the condition (acute vs. chronic). While almost every site (99%) offered services to persons with acute musculoskeletal conditions, more than a quarter (27%) did not offer services for persons with chronic pain. In 81% of sites, the majority of persons who received services waited less than three months. In contrast, the median waiting time for the oldest referral was 16 months (range: 0.3-156 months).

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS
Referral prioritization is commonly used in public outpatient physiotherapy services in Quebec. Most of the sites surveyed prioritized acute conditions to the detriment of persons suffering from chronic pain. Our findings suggest that current prioritization strategies may create inequity of access to services.

OTHER AUTHORS
Marie-Hélène Raymond, MSc.
Maude Laliberté, MSc.
Amélie Lavoie
François Desmeules, PhD
Debbie E Feldman, PhD

Kadija Perreault, PhD