

## Sri Lanka Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Sciences

Editorial

### Curriculum reform as a catalyst for professional excellence in physiotherapy: Reflections from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

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#### Introduction

The field of physiotherapy is evolving rapidly worldwide, influenced by advancements in science, technology, and addressing dynamic healthcare needs. Today, physiotherapy education should be in line with these developments, not only to train competent clinicians but also to develop future leaders, researchers, and innovators in the profession.

The Department of Physiotherapy at the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Peradeniya, stands as one of the pioneering institutions in physiotherapy education in Sri Lanka. The Bachelor of Science Honours in Physiotherapy at the University of Peradeniya was first introduced in 2006, and it was a groundbreaking step in establishing physiotherapy as a recognised healthcare profession in the country. Since its inception, the programme has undergone continuous refinement, guided by both local and global healthcare needs.

This editorial highlights the Department's journey in updating its academic programme through comprehensive curriculum development, adherence to national and international standards, and an emphasis on competency-based learning. These advancements aim to enhance the standard of

physiotherapy education in Sri Lanka and serve as a foundation for continued professional growth and development in the field.

#### Curriculum reform

The curriculum of the Bachelor of Science Honours in Physiotherapy underwent several revisions over the last 19 years to upgrade essential aspects of the programme and in response to various regulatory and legal requirements. In 2012, the comprehensive four-year degree programme was restructured into a 3+1 year format, making an exit point at the 3rd year as a general degree without a research component. In 2014, a 120-credit curriculum was introduced by making the 4th year mandatory, nullifying the proposed 3+1 structure. The 120-credit curriculum was developed, realising the importance of research in physiotherapy and to be in par with the World Physiotherapy (previously known as World Confederation of Physiotherapy) guidelines. However, the more comprehensive curriculum revision commenced in 2018, as per the recommendation by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of updating the curriculum every five years and mainly to meet the standards of the World Physiotherapy and level 6 of the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF), ensuring both local relevance and international compatibility.

The curriculum revision process was performed involving local and international physiotherapy academic experts and stakeholders. A series of curriculum development workshops and discussions were held in 2018, 2019 and 2020 to obtain feedback from the students, alumni, professional experts and other stakeholders. This broad stakeholder engagement ensured that the revised curriculum reflects both national healthcare priorities and emerging global trends in physiotherapy practice and education. It also enabled a comprehensive review of the programme structure, course content, assessment methods, and teaching strategies.

With the revised curriculum, several new courses were introduced, such as courses focusing on assistive technology, diagnostic tests and imaging, health promotion, disease prevention, professional communication and professional practice. These additions aim to ensure that graduates are not only clinically competent but also adaptive, innovative, and aligned with global healthcare priorities.

The revised curriculum adopts a competency-based, outcome-based education (OBE) framework, ensuring that all learning activities are constructively aligned with the programme outcomes and the intended graduate profile. The integration of the K-SAM model, focusing on Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Mindset into curriculum design, delivery, and assessment, ensures a holistic educational experience. Through constructive alignment of program outcomes, course outcomes, learning activities, and assessment methods, the curriculum equips students with self-directed and collaborative learning, creative and critical thinking, reflective practice, professionalism and ethical decision-making and lifelong learning, and adaptability. A variety of learning methods, including lectures, practical and lab-based classes, hospital-based clinical training, community-based learning, and evidence-based practice, enable students to translate theoretical knowledge into clinical competency.

## **Clinical training, research and state-of-the-art facilities**

A key strength of the BSc. Honours Physiotherapy programme is its strong emphasis on clinical training, offered via Teaching Hospitals, Specialised Hospitals, and Community Setups across the island. This broad exposure equips students with a well-rounded clinical foundation across all core areas of physiotherapy.

In parallel, the Department is equipped with laboratory facilities to support both undergraduate and postgraduate research. The Department houses an Electrotherapy laboratory, an Exercise Therapy Laboratory, a Pulmonary Rehabilitation Centre, and a Geriatric Assessment Laboratory. These laboratories provide a good environment for hands-on learning, innovation, and applied research, enabling students to investigate emerging areas in physiotherapy and contribute to evidence-based practice.

Research is an essential pillar of physiotherapy, as it empowers practitioners to deliver evidence-based practice. By engaging with current evidence and contributing to new findings, physiotherapists can optimise patient outcomes, improve patient care, and uplift the profession. Recognising this, the undergraduate research component plays a vital role in developing students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and scientific literacy. Our undergraduates have produced numerous research abstracts, full articles, and conference presentations, showcasing the depth and quality of their academic and clinical exploration.

## **The establishment of Master's degrees in Physiotherapy**

The establishment of the first-ever Master's degree in Physiotherapy in Sri Lanka, the Master of Science in Physiotherapy programme (MSc in Physiotherapy) at the University of Peradeniya, was initiated in response to the growing demand from

physiotherapy graduates, as no such postgraduate programme previously existed in the country. This milestone will significantly strengthen the professional identity of the physiotherapy graduates and broaden their career pathways. Designed with a strong emphasis on both research and clinical specialisation, the programme aims to develop advanced practitioners, clinical leaders, and academic contributors in the field. Through this initiative, the University of Peradeniya continues to play a pivotal role in upgrading the standards of the physiotherapy profession in Sri Lanka and producing a new generation of physiotherapists equipped to lead in both local and international healthcare settings.

### **The way forward**

The Department of Physiotherapy at the University of Peradeniya has consistently shown its commitment to excellence by supporting faculty development, making national and international

collaborations, and producing future physiotherapy practitioners, educators and researchers.

The Department aims to pursue several key directions for future growth and development. One major focus is upgrading the curriculum with global standards in physiotherapy practice and incorporating emerging treatment methods to better prepare students for emerging trends in healthcare delivery. The department also seeks to strengthen international collaborations by enhancing faculty exchanges and research collaborations, thereby fostering international exposure and competence among students and staff.

Additionally, the Department plans to expand its community outreach services, including those offered through the outpatient physiotherapy units and community-based and geriatric rehabilitation programmes, ensuring broader access to quality physiotherapy care.