

Meeting the Challenges of Extending the Scope of Physiotherapists

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There is a modest body of published evidence to suggest that extending the scope of physiotherapy practice improves the quality of patient care, safely and effectively reduces hospital waiting lists, relieves demands on doctors, and increases access to effective and appropriate treatment. However, there are anecdotal reports that Advanced Scope Physiotherapy services have been introduced in Australia over the past few years on little robust research evidence regarding the best approaches to structuring service reforms such as this, the processes of up-skilling physiotherapists or introducing ESP physiotherapy services into existing service models, or measureable stakeholder outcomes which might result from this initiative. ACT Health sees potential benefits in advancing and extending the scope of Physiotherapy in terms of improved workflow and waiting times, unloading currently overloaded services, improving patient health outcomes and decreasing service and opportunity costs. Qualities such as expert, clinical leader and specialist have been proposed as desirable; however definitions and measures of these are unclear. Given the lack of robust literature to support the implementation of ESP physiotherapy roles, ACT Health has undertaken a rigorous developmental approach regarding definitions, training and role modelling.

This paper presents lessons learnt in terms of defining Extended Scope Physiotherapy in the Emergency Department and Orthopaedics, how ACT health has attempted to identify the right people to undertake the roles, the credentialing process and the process by which these positions have been integrated into the existing workforce.