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**STATEMENT BY THE WORLD CONFEDERATION FOR PHYSICAL  
THERAPY (WCPT)**

**By Gayline Manalang Jr.**

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) is committed to improving global health by encouraging high standards of physical therapy research, education and practice; supporting the exchange of information between regions and member organizations; and collaborating with national and international organizations.

Physical therapists are experts in physical activity and thus one of their primary functions is to improve the health of individuals through physical activity. Raising awareness of the efficacy of exercise and physical activity and working with individuals and populations to reverse the physical inactivity trend has been shown to impact positively on health and global mortality and is endorsed in a report published by the World Bank (The World Bank Human Development Network, September 2011).

Physical therapists can play a major role in improving the health status of populations with obesity, cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic respiratory problems and certain types of cancers by prescribing and monitoring specific exercise programmes for adults and children diagnosed with such conditions. The WCPT submits that having physiotherapists to oversee the preventive educations and rehabilitation management of non-communicable diseases is a cost effective way of contributing to this global health burden. To be effective there needs to be engagement by government and community organisations with the physical therapists to support effective health promotion and disease prevention programmes. The strategic plan needs to emphasize not only prevention but also to ensure the approach is cost effective, fiscally sustainable and appropriately targeted. One such model, the Agita Sao Paulo Programme launched in 1996 aimed to increase the population's knowledge on the importance of physical activity levels by 20% over 10 years and required a State contribution of less than \$0.01 per inhabitant per year. Outcomes reported showed that in the period 2002-2008 the proportion of residents undertaking less than 150 minutes of weekly activity fell from 43.7% to 11.6% (Matsudo et al 2010).

For such a plan in the Region to be sustainable investment needs to be made in educating higher numbers of physical therapists. In particular WCPT is concerned about:

- Countries that educate only small cohorts of physiotherapists such that numbers are woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the population

- Physiotherapy programmes offered that do not meet the international guidelines set by WCPT
- Countries that do not have a robust physiotherapy organization to monitor professional standards
- Countries that do not have physiotherapy regulation or licensure in place for the express purpose of providing protection for the public
- Countries with high number of natural disasters where physical injury is a major component of rehabilitation and therefore demand for physical therapy services is high but need is often unmet.

Furthermore without the foundation of learning in physiotherapy being at a level adequate to service a population, the profession cannot grow and optimize its contribution to health, through physical rehabilitation and the promotion of physical wellbeing.

WCPT is a strong advocate for the provision of primary health care that is mindful of local cultural, socio-economic and political circumstances and provides equitable access for all to receive effective physical therapy services. WCPT supports an approach that is flexible and innovative in providing models of service delivery that offer care/service developed in response to local needs. For example the WCPT is party to and embraces the implementation of the Lifestyle Scorecard, recently launched by the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA). The purpose of the card is to enable individuals to own and personalize their own health improvement action plan.

WCPT consults with Governments, local communities and individual groups to establish:

- entry-level professional physiotherapy education programmes that meet the international standards adopted by WCPT; and
- physiotherapy service delivery, including the planning & implementation of physical activity health programmes to reverse the adverse effects of inactivity.

WCPT extends an invitation to delegates and their organizations to enter into discussions towards these ends.

## References

Matsudo VRK, Matsudo SM, Arujo TL, Andrade DR, Olivera LC and Hallal PC. Time trends in physical activity in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil: 2002-2008. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 42(12) 2231-2236. 2010.

The World Bank. *The growing danger of non-communicable diseases: acting now to reverse course*. The World Bank Human Development Network. Conference Edition. September 2011, Washington DC USA.