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STATEMENT BY THE WORLD CONFEDERATION FOR PHYSICAL  
THERAPY (WCPT)

**By Dr Margot Skinner**

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) is an international non-profit professional organization founded in 1951 to represent physical therapists internationally. WCPT is a confederation of national physical therapy associations representing over 300 000 physical therapists from 101 countries. Twenty-one of these member organizations are within the Asia Western Pacific Region, however some of our most significant neighbours including the People's Republic of China are not members, since China has not yet recognized the profession of physical therapy and has few, if any, formal education programmes established that meet WCPT minimal criteria.

Physical therapists aim to identify and maximize human movement potential within the spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, in partnership with their patients and clients. Through the WCPT physical therapists are committed to the development of primary health care and community based rehabilitation by embracing the WHO's model of the International Classification of Function and actively participating in WHO led initiatives, such as the international review of Community-Based Rehabilitation and the work of the Global Health Workforce Alliance.

WCPT's position is one that is mindful of local cultural, socio-economic and political circumstances and provides for equitable access for all its services. WCPT recognizes that:

- local communities and individuals must be partners involved in the physical therapist service delivery, including the planning, operating and monitoring thereof;
- the physical therapy service delivery model is developed in response to an assessment of local needs being mindful of the ethical use of resources and taking into account local cultural and social norms; and
- communities and individuals participating in physical therapy service delivery and rehabilitation should work toward independence and self-reliance wherever and whenever possible.

The WCPT is acutely aware of the rising global health statistics for the effects of noncommunicable diseases that are largely preventable – namely cardiovascular disease and stroke, diabetes, obesity and chronic respiratory problems. Physical therapists play a major role in preventive education for such diseases and in the provision of appropriately prescribed and monitored exercise programmes for

adults and children diagnosed with the conditions. WCPT submits that having more physical therapists educated to participate in the prevention and management programmes for these diseases is a cost effective way of contributing to the health of all of our populations.

Furthermore the WCPT wishes to bring to your attention the important roles that physical therapists have in primary health care, including:

- direct and indirect providers of services
- members of multi-professional teams
- consultants to governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and disabled people's organization (DPOs)
- developers, implementers and managers of services
- educators of other health personnel and staff

The WCPT has a major concern for populations that have no access to physical therapy services through lack of recognition by governments for the establishment of physical therapy programmes, and for populations that have minimal access to physical therapy services. Minimal access is often the result of a combination of the following problems:

- woefully inadequate numbers of physical therapists educated, and thus the majority of a population who could benefit from physical therapy is denied access;
- the entry-level professional physical therapy education programme is below the international standards adopted by WCPT; and
- where physical therapists are not recognized as registered health professionals (as doctors are), the public is put at risk through lack of a statute to protect them and guarantee the competence expected of physical therapists.

The recent natural disasters in Myanmar and the Sichuan province of China serve to illustrate how difficult it is for physical therapists to provide appropriate and timely physical therapy care for the survivors when it is not an established health professional. WCPT recognizes that it is the prerogative of countries involved to call on the outside world for help in such disasters. However, the lack of a recognized member organization and established physical therapist educational programmes in the cases of China and Myanmar as examples has meant that WHO Collaborating Rehabilitation Groups have had to recruit physical therapist volunteers from outside. Physical therapists in such situations are called on to provide physical therapy services in hospitals and out-patient clinics; and support for rehabilitation programmes for adults and children, as well as clinical teaching mentoring of local staff.

The WCPT wishes to express its thanks for the opportunity to address the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific and urges governments in the Region to drive support for the establishment of physical therapists' educational programmes that meet international guidelines and for appropriate recognition of physical therapist practice through statute, licensure, or regulation. The WCPT and its national physical therapy associations are both desirous of and totally willing to work with governments, NGOs and DPOs to promote and facilitate the development and provision of physical therapy services and to contribute to the health of the populations in each of our countries.