

Some characteristics of therapy and rehabilitation students' communicative competence (Bogomolets National Medical University)

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To determine the main characteristics of the physical therapist's communicative competence and propose teaching methods of improving it.

Materials and Methods: A survey with 193 Bogomolets NMU physical therapy students of study years 2-6 was conducted using the author's questionnaire. This form aimed to define the level of their communicative competence, as well as rank the importance of competence for respondents, self-assessment of the competence level, and the respondents' experience of communicative competence classes. Participation in the survey was voluntary, by the consent of the respondents.

Results: The results indicate that the students possess communicative strategies and ethically correct approaches to behavior, high self-esteem, high levels of self-awareness, and self-confidence. Numerous students showed good and excellent characteristics of communication, which indicates their ability to choose best communication strategies. The students' self-assessment of communication skills, mostly positive, indicates a high level of self-awareness and self-confidence in their communication abilities.

Conclusions: The physical and occupational therapy students are aware of communicative strategies and ethically correct approaches in behavior, which results from their undergraduate study. However, the communicative competence skills should be emphasized during the undergraduate studies, regarding the interactional character of therapists' job.

KEY WORDS: self-esteem, communicative competence, self-awareness, communicative strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The communicative competence of physical therapy students is a key component of their professional activity, defined as the ability of efficient interaction with patients, colleagues and others, by different communication approaches, such as verbal, nonverbal, written and etc. The competence includes not only the ability of correct information presentation, but also listening, interpreting and responding to the needs of patients with empathy. The communication competence is particularly important in physical therapy, since a physical therapist often works with individuals with physical, mental, or cognitive limitations. Such patients may have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the physical therapist's ability to correctly interpret and respond to nonverbal cues becomes the key to successful therapy. So, an effective communication helps to establish trusting relationships with patients.

It is a fundamental one in creating a comfortable and supportive treatment environment, and also helps to take history, define the patient's needs and produce the treatment strategy. Shaping the communication skills during undergraduate medical studies is important for the physical therapy students, as it ensures high level of their professionalism and efficiency, increases the quality of therapy and contributes to the faster patients' recovery.

Shaping the communicative competence skills during undergraduate medical education of the therapy and rehabilitation students is critically important for their professional development and efficiency. It represents a component of such courses as «Ethics in Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy», «Management and Marketing in Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy», «Models of Rehabilitation Service», and will be integrated into all clinical courses. The students learn

the ethical aspects of the profession, empathy in active listening skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills. This allows for productive interaction of the physical and occupational therapy students with patients. The communicative competence course is completely integrated into the entire educational process, at classes of anatomy, physiology, general psychology or physical therapy and occupational therapy. It is important for the students to learn and explain medical and rehabilitation concepts in coherent language, to adapt their communication for the patients. The communicative competence includes the skills of team work, conflict management and public speaking skills.

The classes dedicated to the communication competence include practical exercises, role plays, and clinical simulations. Reflection on practice, receiving feedback from teachers and fellow-students are important for awareness and improvement of one's communication skills. The interdisciplinary approach provides for mastering the communication skills with patients, their relatives, colleagues and teachers. This promotes inter-professional collaboration and increases the quality of the patient-centered approach.

Teaching communicative competencies should be dynamic, adapted to modern challenges. Given the constant changes in the healthcare, and the diversity of patient needs, the physical therapy and occupational therapy students' curriculum must be flexible, providing opportunity for continuous professional development.

Thus, communicative competence in undergraduate training is fundamental for highly qualified physical and occupational therapy students, who will interact efficiently in modern medical environment and provide high-quality rehabilitation assistance to patients. Considering these aspects in educational programs contributes not only to the professional development of students but also increases the quality of health care in general.

AIM

The aim of study is to determine the main characteristics of the physical therapist communicative competence and propose methods of improving it during undergraduate education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

193 therapy and rehabilitation Bogomolets NMU students of years 2-4 filled in the questionnaires and completed the test papers in 2023-2024. The students of day-time education were surveyed in Kyiv, Ukraine. The participation was voluntary, upon the students' consent. The data remained anonymous.

Students were asked to fill out the author's test with tasks to determine communicative strategies in co-operation, adaptation, confrontation, avoidance, and choose ethically correct strategies of behavior such as support, cooperation and empathy. The test results were converted and ranked into a 5-point scale, where the predominant choice of optimal strategies (80-100%) was determined by a score of 5, a large number of choices of optimal strategies (60-79%) – a score of 4, the average number of choices of optimal strategies, with predominating non-productive choices (35%-59%) – a score of 3. Predominance of unproductive choices and a rather low choice of productive strategies (20%-34%) had a score of 2, and the absolute predominance of unproductive strategies, lack of choice of empathy corresponded to score of 1 (less than 19% of choosing optimal strategies).

The respondents were also asked to self-assess their communication strategies on a scale of «very good», «rather good than bad», «average», «rather bad than good», and «bad». On a similar scale, respondents were asked to rate the importance of communicative competence for them, on the scale «very important», «rather important than not important», «can't decide», «rather not important than important», and «not important».

Another question was whether students had studied communicative competence as a separate course, and whether they could recollect their teachers mention communicative competence in classes, with the answer options «yes», «no», «can't remember».

Approval from the University has been granted for conducting this research, confirming its ethical procedure. The research procedures adhere to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration. All research participants willingly consented to become respondents, having previously completed informed consent forms. To ensure comprehensive understanding, the researchers provided a research information sheet detailing the research background, objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits to respondents.

The obtained results were treated using the Statistica 13.0 program.

RESULTS

The results of the survey are represented in table 1. According to the value of choosing the optimal communication strategies, 15.06% of 29 students received a score of 5; 29.53% of 57 students received "4"; 39.89% of 77 students received "3". Additionally, 9.84% of 19 students received a score of 2; 5.68% of 9 students received "1".

Regarding self-assessment of communication strategies, 19.18% (37 students) rated their abilities as «very good», and 35.23% (68 students) rated them as «rather

Table 1. Development of communicative competence of Bogomolets NMU therapy and rehabilitation students, n= 193

Name	Level									
Choosing the optimal communication strategies	«5»		«4»		«3»		«2»		«1»	
	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty
	15.06	29	29.53	57	39.89	77	9.84	19	5.68	9
Self-assessment of communication strategies	«Very good»		«Rather good than bad»		«Average»		«Rather bad than good»		«Bad»	
	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty
	19.87	37	35.23	68	30.05	58	10.36	20	5.18	10
Importance of communication competence	«Very important»		«Rather important than not important»		«Can't decide»		«Rather not important than important»		«Not important»	
	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty	%	q-ty
	50.25	97	30.06	58	15.03	29	3.1	6	1.56	3
Learning communicative competence at medical classes	Positive				Negative				Could not remember	
	%	q-ty			%	q-ty			%	q-ty
	60.1	116			30.05	58			9,85	19
Level of understanding of communication strategies	High level		Above average		Average		Low level			
	%				q-ty		%		q-ty	
	75.12				145		24.88		48	

good than bad». Almost one-third, 30.05% (58 students) mentioned about «average» abilities, 10.36% (20 students) – as «rather bad than good», and only 5,18% (10 students) confirmed their abilities were «bad».

As for the importance of communication competence for physical therapists and occupational therapists, almost a half, 50.25% (97 students) consider it «very important», and another third, 30.06% (58 students) – «rather important than not important». 15% of the students (29 people) couldn't decide, and, overall, for 4% it was not important and slightly important.

Regarding the experience of developing communicative competence skills during undergraduate studies, 60.1% (116 students) answered positively, 30.05% (58 students) answered negatively, and 9.85% (19 students) couldn't recollect.

As for the knowledge of communication strategies, the vast majority – 75.12% (145 students) received grades from 3 to 5, which indicates an average, above average and high level of the communication strategies knowledge. At the same time, a small number of students – 24,88% (48 students) showed a low level of knowledge. This indicates a generally satisfactory level of education in communications, and stresses that curriculum should be more focused on the development of communication skills.

DISCUSSION

Despite the results obtained, there is a need for additional research to determine whether these as-

sessments reflect students' actual competence in the practical application of these skills.

The theme of the physical therapy competence received quite wide coverage by the teachers and psychologists, and is reflected in numerous papers. In their work, Brighton, LJ, & Bristowe, K. [1] emphasized the importance of communication in palliative care, particularly how healthcare professionals can effectively discuss end-of-life issues with patients. Furthermore, the conducted research confirms and expands the data presented by numerous studies by Włoszczak-Szubza, A., & Jarosz, M.J., on the influence of the level of development of communicative competencies and their impact on the quality and results of professional activity [2, 3, 4]. As the majority of students rated their communication skills as «good» or «rather good than bad», this indicates self-confidence in their communication abilities or overestimated self-esteem of the respondents, which emphasizes the need for an objective assessment of students' skills, both by self-assessment and assessment by teachers. It is important to find out, whether there are specific educational or psychological barriers that prevent some students from developing effective communication strategies.

According to the research, more than 80% of students consider communication competence important or very important, which underlines the general awareness of the importance of these skills in professional development, which is confirmed by the results of studies by O'Keeffe M. and others [5], and Bastemeijer

CM, and Naamanka K. [6]. Awareness of the importance of communication skills indicates its significance for interaction with patients also widely discussed. It is noteworthy that McGowan E. and others [7] identify the same core competencies required of physiotherapists working with refugees, while Wijma, AJ and others [8] outline stress on the patient-centredness in physiotherapy, identifying the approaches and attitudes that physiotherapists should adopt to ensure that patients' needs and perspectives are prioritized.

Awareness of the importance of communicative competence, as stated by McGowan E[9] and Wijma AJ [10], and confirmed by the results of this study, also indicates the desire of students to develop critical professional skills, reflecting global trends in medical education, which emphasize the importance of "soft skills" alongside with technical knowledge.

More than a half of the students (60%) indicated that they had completed a course on communicative competence, which may reflect sufficient training by the teaching staff. This reflects current trends in medical education, which is also noted in the study of other authors.

Based on the data, in order to optimize the training of first (bachelor) therapy and rehabilitation students and improve their communicative competence, we consider necessary the following steps: integration of communicative competence courses in all specializations, conducting practical classes and role-playing games to apply theoretical knowledge, systematic feedback and

self-assessment, objectivizing assessment, introducing interdisciplinary approach, mentoring and mentoring programs to transfer experience, using modern technologies, such as VR, for simulating clinical scenarios, and supporting research of communicative competence.


CONCLUSIONS

In general, the results show good knowledge of communicative strategies and ethically correct approaches in behavior by the therapy and rehabilitation students. The large number of students, who scored 4 and 5, indicates their ability to choose optimal strategies. Students' self-assessment of their communication skills, mostly positive, indicates a high level of self-awareness and self-confidence in their own communication abilities. The high assessment of the importance of communicative competence by the majority of students emphasizes the awareness of the need for these skills in professional and personal life. The overwhelming number of students, who remember taking a course on communicative competence may indicate the effectiveness of such courses within the curriculum.

Several directions for further research can be identified: analysis of the effectiveness of communicative competence courses, research on the effect of self-awareness on the development of communicative skills, assessment of changes in communicative strategies over time, study of the correlation between academic success and communicative skills.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST



The Authors declare no conflict of interest



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