Investigating the public’s perception of physiotherapy: Why do people choose not to go to physiotherapy?

Effective marketing of physiotherapy is essential if the profession is to operate successfully in the competitive health care marketplace in Australia. In developing strategies to market physiotherapy services, there must be an understanding of the general public’s perceptions about physiotherapy and how these perceptions relate to their uptake of physiotherapy services. Although there is published literature on the general public’s level of knowledge about physiotherapy, there is no research investigating why people choose not to select physiotherapy as a health option for treatment. Understanding how people make this choice is essential for marketing the profession. This study has used a qualitative approach to access and interpret the perceptions of people who have never been to physiotherapy, in order to investigate why people may not want to go to physiotherapy. Narrative methods of analysis were used to produce fictional accounts, co-constructed by the researcher and participant, about seeking physiotherapy for back pain. The co-constructed narratives generated were then subjected to second order coding for emergent themes. General practitioners and personal recommendations were found to be important sources that participants would use to gather information about physiotherapy and alternative services. People are less likely to access physiotherapy if their perceptions about physiotherapy do not match their needs and preferences. Participants in this study expressed a range of preferences, but the findings indicate that meeting the needs of clients requires that physiotherapists must actively listen to their clients and involve them in treatment decisions.