

International Trends in the Practice of Animal Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation

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Introduction

The field of animal health care is changing rapidly. This phenomenon is partly due to the knowledge transfer from the human health care field to the veterinary field, but also to the fact that animal owners are expecting and demanding more alternative health care options and a wider range of services for their pets. In addition, more and more owners are partaking in a wider scope of sports with their animals, such as agility, obedience, freestyle, or flyball with their dogs, and dressage, three-day eventing, reining and cutting, or barrel racing with their horses. With greater physical demands on these animals come larger risks of physical injury and, therefore, a greater need for health care intervention to return these animals to full, pain-free function as quickly as possible. The field of animal rehabilitation has emerged as a result of this need, and we can anticipate that this field is only going to continue to expand and grow in the foreseeable future.

Background

The animal rehabilitation division of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, currently named The Canadian Horse and Animal Physical Rehabilitation Division (CHAP), was first established in 1994 as an organized group of physical therapists interested in using their professional skills to treat animals. In 1994, CHAP was the third such group of its kind in the world, following the lead of Great Britain in 1984 and the Netherlands in 1989. In 2004, CHAP was officially recognized as a special interest group of the CPA. Currently, there are 12 countries with animal physiotherapy groups/divisions which form part of their national physiotherapy association. Other countries include South Africa, Sweden, Spain, Finland, Australia, the United States, Switzerland, Ireland, and Belgium. All of these animal physiotherapy associations fully recognize that additional educational is necessary for a physical therapist to engage in the practice of animal rehabilitation. Each of these countries has (or is) taken the initiative of creating its own educational system and setting of standards to train physical therapists in animal rehabilitation / physiotherapy / physical therapy.

Purpose of this Study

As the field of animal physiotherapy and rehabilitation expands and gains credibility, it is useful to look internationally at how other countries have managed to accept, encourage, guide, and/or regulate the practice of animal rehabilitation by qualified physiotherapist. Problems and challenges unique to this

specialized area of practice are encountered world-wide, and understanding how each nation deals with these can be beneficial in guiding other countries through similar situations.

Methods

In early 2007, a survey consisting of 11 questions was sent out via direct e-mail to the animal physiotherapy associations in 12 nations; Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. These countries are known to have organized animal physiotherapy or rehabilitation associations whose membership consists of trained / licensed physiotherapists. Responses were obtained from 10 of the 12 nations, and information on the remaining 2 nations (Great Britain & Ireland) was composed from previous knowledge of or former contact with these organizations as well as information available on websites. Additional information on educational requirements to practice animal rehab in each country was obtained via a survey conducted by the Swedish animal physiotherapy association.

Results

Question 1:

What is the official name of your animal physiotherapy association and what year was your association formed?

Australia	Animal Physiotherapy Group – a special interest group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association. The forerunner to this group (The Australian Animal Physiotherapy Association) was formed in 1998 acted as a separate body until acceptance by the APA in 2004.
Belgium	Belgian Association for Certified Animal Physiotherapists (BACAP). Formation was in 2006.
Canada	The Canadian Horse and Animal Physical Rehabilitation Division (a division of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association) – CHAP. The previous name (prior to recognition by the CPA) was The Canadian Horse and Animal Physical Therapists Association (est. 1994).
Finland	Suomen Eläinfysioterapeutit (Finish Animal Physiotherapy Association). It was formed in 1997.
Great Britain	The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Physiotherapy (ACPAT). It was formed in 1984.
Ireland	From my understanding they just formed in 2006-2007
The Netherlands	Nederlandse Vereniging voor Fysiotherapie bij Dieren (NVFD) (Dutch Association for Animal Physiotherapy). It was formed on March 16 th , 1989.

South Africa	Animal Physiotherapy Group of South Africa – A special interest group of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. It was reconstituted in 1997.
Spain	Comissió de fisioteràpia veterinària (Veterinary Physiotherapy Commission) within the Physiotherapy College of Catalonia. It was established in 2002. In Spain, each region has its own official college of physiotherapists (the Catalonian physiotherapists were the first ones interested in working with animals)
Sweden	Legitimerade Sjukgymnaster inom Veterinär Medicin (LSVET) – (Certified Physiotherapists in Veterinary Medicine). It was formed in 1995.
Switzerland	Schweizerischer Verband für Tierphysiotherapie (SVTPT) – (Swiss Association for Animal Physiotherapy). It was formed in 1998.
The United States of America	The Animal Physical Therapy Special Interest Group of the Orthopaedic Section of the American Physical Therapy Association Inc. The first name was the Veterinary Physical Therapy SIG, and organizational discussion began in the late 1990's. (1998)

Question 2.

What year was your group/association officially recognized by your national physiotherapy association?

Australia	2004
Belgium	There is not one national physiotherapy association. There are several. That is why the BACAP is an independent association, not a subgroup of a national physiotherapy association.
Canada	2004
Finland	1997
Great Britain	Recognition was gained in 1987 by both the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	The association was immediately recognized by the national physiotherapy association and the profession is recognized by the government since August 1 st , 1992.
South Africa	1997

Spain	There is a Spanish Physiotherapy Association, which has representation in the World Confederation of Physical Therapy, but most physiotherapists do not belong to this association. Instead, the regional professional colleges of physiotherapy are the ones that official regulate or govern most physiotherapist in Spain (i.e. the Physiotherapy College of Catalonia)
Sweden	1996
Switzerland	1998
The United States of America	1998

Question 3.

Approximately how many physiotherapists are currently members of your association?

Australia	55
Belgium	10
Canada	109
Finland	80
Great Britain	Unknown
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	220
South Africa	57
Spain	12
Sweden	190
Switzerland	90
The United States of America	Approximately 450

Question 4.

Is the practice of animal physiotherapy by licensed physiotherapists/ physical therapists regulated by your physiotherapy association(s), other(s) or not yet regulated?

Australia	It is regulated in the sense that all members have to be registered human physiotherapists.
Belgium	It is not yet regulated, but the association is working on it.
Canada	Practice is not yet regulated.
Finland	There is no regulation yet.
Great Britain	<p>Practice is regulated by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.</p> <p>The laws in the UK are very clear about who can, and can't treat animals. A summary of the key points of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Exemptions) in relation to complementary therapies for animals are highlighted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Veterinary Surgery (Exemptions) Order 1962 allows for the treatment of animals by 'physiotherapy', provided that the animal has first been seen by a veterinary surgeon who has diagnosed the condition and decided that it should be treated by physiotherapy under his/her direction. • 'Physiotherapy' is interpreted as including all kinds of manipulative therapy. It therefore includes osteopathy and chiropractic but would not, for example, include acupuncture or aromatherapy. • Manipulative therapies cover only Physiotherapy, Osteopathy and Chiropractic. The act allows these therapies where a vet has diagnosed the condition and decided that this treatment would be appropriate.
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	Practice is regulated by our own association (the NVFD). Neither the veterinary association, nor the physiotherapy association has authority over the way we conduct our practice
South Africa	Regulation of practice is by the South African Society of Physiotherapy and registered physiotherapists are regulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa. The vet association acknowledged the role that we play in regards to working o a referral basis (a meeting is scheduled for early 2008 to formalize a document pertaining to this).
Spain	It is not regulated
Sweden	The practice of animal physiotherapy is not yet regulated. An application regarding certification and regulation is now handled by our government.
Switzerland	It is regulated by our own association (the SVTPT)

The United States of America	Practice is regulated from State to State. When practicing with animals PTs must comply with both the PT and the veterinary boards in that state. Colorado and Nevada are the only states with specific legislation pertaining to the regulation / practice of animal physical therapy by physical therapists.
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Question 5.

Can member of your association obtain malpractice insurance for the practice of animal physiotherapy?

Australia	Yes, if applicants are members of the Animal Physiotherapy Group and have a formal Masters qualification (Masters in Animal Studies in Animal Physiotherapy).
Belgium	No insurance is yet available. The association is also working on this.
Canada	Yes, group professional indemnity insurance has been negotiated by CHAP.
Finland	This question was not understood.
Great Britain	Yes
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	Yes. It is available for individuals or collectively.
South Africa	Yes, as part of membership with the South African Society of Physiotherapy
Spain	Yes, the same professional liability insurance (called 'civil responsibility insurance') obtained through the college of physiotherapists covers the practice of physiotherapy in animals.
Sweden	Yes, ordinary insurance companies will provide this coverage.
Switzerland	Yes.
The United States of America	Yes.

Question 6.

Is the title physiotherapist / physical therapist protected and restricted to practice on humans? Is the title animal physiotherapist / physical therapist and terms animal physiotherapy / physical therapy allowed in your country?

Australia	The title 'physiotherapist' is protected for those that are qualified human physiotherapists and all of our qualified animal physiotherapists are qualified human physiotherapists. The word physiotherapy is also protected and can only be used when related to qualified physiotherapists. However, terms such as 'animal therapist' are not protected.
Belgium	The title 'physiotherapist' is protected and restricted to practice on humans. 'Animal physiotherapist' is allowed but not yet protected or restricted.
Canada	The titles physiotherapist and physical therapist are protected titles. Protection of the terms physical therapy and physiotherapy vary from province to province. The title of animal physiotherapist or physical therapist are not permitted, the term 'physiotherapy / physical therapy' in conjunction with 'animal' varies from province to province. The term animal rehabilitation is commonly used.
Finland	Yes
Great Britain	The term physiotherapist is not protected, but chartered physiotherapist is protected. The titles and terms animal + physiotherapist / physiotherapy are permitted.
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	The title physiotherapist is protected and so is the title animal physiotherapist.
South Africa	The protection of these terms/titles are not protected and are currently under legal examination
Spain	It is understood that the post graduate training in animal physiotherapy (and subsequent professional practice in animal physiotherapy and insurance for its practice) is within the range of what is commonly done in the field of physiotherapy.
Sweden	In Sweden the term Legitimerad Sjukgymnast is protected. The title physiotherapist / physical therapist are not yet protected, but the hope is that it soon will be.
Switzerland	The titles are not restricted to humans, and the term 'animal physiotherapist' is allowed. Currently, the association is in the process of getting federal recognition of our final examination in order to get the title 'certified animal physiotherapist' with Swiss federal diploma.

The United States of America	This varies from state to state. Nevada and Colorado are the only states that have legislation on the use of animal in conjunction with 'physical therapist' or 'physical therapy'.
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Question 7.

Does veterinary legislation in your country include animal physiotherapy / physical therapy within the veterinarians' scope of practice?

Australia	No per se. Veterinary legislation varies from State to State, however in essence they are the only ones allowed to make a diagnosis. In some states, they also have to state the treatment program. However, as an Association, we have agreed that we should seek a veterinary referral in all cases – however, this can be interpreted in different ways.
Belgium	No.
Canada	These words are not specifically used, but a veterinarian is allowed by law to treat any animal by any reasonable means in all provinces.
Finland	The wording of the legislation states that diagnoses must be made by a veterinarian in order to obtain physiotherapy services, however physiotherapy practice is allowed to be performed by other educated groups. (The education of these groups is not specified)
Great Britain	Unknown
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	In the Netherlands, both veterinarians and animal physiotherapists are allowed to use animal physiotherapy to treat an animal in a curative way. No one else is allowed to do that. There is however a 'grey' area when it comes to treating healthy animals.
South Africa	Yes, but it appears that only the veterinary nurses have physiotherapy modalities included in their training and are trying to extend their physiotherapy training.
Spain	No
Sweden	No
Switzerland	No, but the students in upcoming years will have 2 hour lessons about physiotherapy.
The United States of America	Some states (Florida, Georgia, & Maine) have added 'physical therapy' to their practice acts as a practice domain for veterinarians and their staff. Any licensed veterinarian may practice 'rehabilitation' on animals in every State. Licensed veterinarians are not

	restricted from providing ‘treatment of any nature’ for animals, regardless of educational background or training in animal rehabilitation.
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Question 8.

What additional education is needed / provided in your country for the practice of animal physiotherapy / physical therapy by physiotherapists / physical therapists? Who provides the training and where is it provided?

Australia	A Masters in Animal Studies (Animal Physiotherapy), offered through the University of Queensland. It is a two-year part time program, conducted mostly as distance education, with 3-weeks per year of on-campus clinical training. Additional workshops and seminars are also held. NOTE: The UQ program has recently ceased. The APG is working with another university to take up the program and continue its implementation.(LEH)
Belgium	No additional education is needed because animal physiotherapy isn’t protected or restricted. There is an additional education of 2 year provided for physiotherapists and veterinarians at the University of Ghent. The training is done by animal physiotherapists and vets.
Canada	CHPAT mandates that additional education is required for the practice of animal rehabilitation, and provides continuing education courses for licensed physical therapists in Equine and Canine Rehabilitation. These courses, plus additional home study requirements, and examinations will form the basis for the proposed Diplomas in Equine (or Canine) Physical Rehabilitation Therapy. The proposals would require 200 hours in one or the other discipline for certification purposes. Training is provided by physical therapists as well as veterinarians. Other courses of interest are also offered.
Finland	There is no legislation from the state that mandates educational requirements. The Finish Animal Physiotherapy Association has fixed rules: Animal physiotherapy education is provided to trained physiotherapists and consists of 30 study lessons (25%), practical sessions (25%), assignments and independent studies (which include independent practicals) (50%). The studies are organized by Satakunta University of Applied Studies (This university provided physiotherapy education as well). We have not been able to provide any practical training yet, but in the future it will be part of the education.
Great Britain	ACPAT runs basic education courses in canine or equine physiotherapy, as well as seminars. Physiotherapists are divided into two division: Category A members (those practicing and “accredited” by means of course work and clinical internship) and Category B members (those engaged in self study / course work and who must apprentice with a

	<p>Category A member who ultimately 'signs' whether they are worthy of qualification as a Category A member.</p> <p>Additional to this structure is the Master of Science (in Veterinary Physiotherapy) offered by the Royal Veterinary College. There is also the same training, minus the research component, culminating in a diploma in Veterinary Physiotherapy. This level of education is not the mandated standard of education in order to practice however.</p>
Ireland	Unknown, but they are presumably affiliated with the ACPAT system currently.
The Netherlands	After being graduated as a physiotherapist, one would have to study animal physiotherapy at the Cursuscentrum Diervorzorging Barneveld (CDB). It is a 1.5 year program consisting of 175 hours of training, observation of 35 treatments with a practicing animal physiotherapist, as well as examinations (practical and written) and a case report. One may not practice animal physiotherapy or call oneself an animal physiotherapist without this education. The CDB in Barneveld is an independent school and is not part of the faculty of veterinary medicine.
South Africa	The South African Animal Physiotherapy Group maintains that physiotherapists require 2 years of post graduate human clinical experience before treating animals. No formal training yet exists. Annual conferences and occasional courses organized by the APGSA. The only other options are to travel internationally to attend courses and obtain qualifications.
Spain	There is an official post graduate degree offered by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Autonomous University of Barcelona) at the Escola Universitaria Gimbernat, termed 'postgraduate degree in physiotherapy in large animals'. It is a course-based program and only included horses. Currently, there is no official training program for physiotherapists in dogs. The training is both theory and practicals and takes place at both the University as well as equine centres.
Sweden	No additional education is needed and no formal education is provided. However, in 1999 – 2002, there were approximately 30 physiotherapists who studied "Veterinarian Medicine for Physiotherapists" at the University for Veterinary in Uppsala. This was the only formal education that was arranged in Sweden. It was a two-year part-time program. Due to lack of resources, the education is currently "on hold".
Switzerland	Presently, there are 32 days of training and a final examination. With federal recognition, the plan is for 58 days of training, totally 800 hours of study time (including self study). The SVTPT is providing the training in Zurich and Berne, depending on the type of subject that is learned.
The United States of	No additional education is required by law for anyone to practice 'animal rehabilitation' as an employee of a veterinarian. Nevada is the exception, specifically mentioning that

America	training is required, but the training itself is not specified. There are two formal certification programs that consist of theory and practical sessions, as well as home study requirements and examinations.
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Question 9.

Are veterinarians able to obtain animal physiotherapy training / education within your country?

Australia	Not at this stage
Belgium	Yes (see above)
Canada	Not within Canada, but many travel to the USA to obtain certification in animal rehabilitation through one of the certification programs there.
Finland	Yes, however the primary target group is physiotherapists.
Great Britain	No
Ireland	Unknown, but presumably no.
The Netherlands	No
South Africa	No
Spain	This same post graduate course is offered to physiotherapists and veterinarians
Sweden	Planned education will only be available to human physiotherapists
Switzerland	Vets may follow the course for physiotherapists, but it is very difficult for them.
The United States of America	Vets as well as veterinary technicians may enrol in these certification courses. One of the programs will admit entrance to any person interested in completing their course.

Question 10.

Where do animal physical therapists practice in your country (i.e. vet clinics, private practice, house call, etc.)?

Australia	A variety of practice occurs – private practice, attached to vet clinics, house calls, etc
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Belgium	Practice occurs in vet clinics, private practice, house call, and hydrotherapy centres
Canada	Practice occurs in vet clinics, by house call/barn call, in home offices, in animal rehab centres and in hydrotherapy centres.
Finland	Practice occurs in vet clinics (canine), private practice (canine), house call (equine mainly)
Great Britain	Practice occurs in vet clinics, by house call/barn call, in home offices, in animal rehab centres and in hydrotherapy centres.
Ireland	Unknown
The Netherlands	All of the above (vet clinics, private practice, house call)
South Africa	Private practice, some treat at vet clinics and other provide a house call service.
Spain	In equine practice, physios work in ambulatory clinics, or in private clinics, as well there are large and small animal physiotherapy centres and some physios practice via house call.
Sweden	Those who work with small animals are often employed by vet clinics. Physiotherapists working with horses often do house calls and have their own business.
Switzerland	Most do house calls, followed by private practice and very few clinics (private clinics).
The United States of America	Most PT's that are practicing with animals are legally doing so as employees of veterinarians and are restricted to practice in veterinary clinics. They are technically working as veterinary aides, assistants or technicians in these scenarios. Some may practice legally in other settings in accordance to their state vet practice acts.

Question 11.

Is there any additional information that you would like to share or that you think is pertinent?

Australia	It is difficult for people to start a career in Animal Physiotherapy for a variety of reasons (a) limited contacts in the field, (b) poor veterinary understanding and acceptance, (c) a multitude of alternative practitioners in the field with little training but great PR backing (e.g. Equissage), which makes it very difficult for vets and clientele to select who to use.
Belgium	There are many problems with untrained and not very diplomatic people trying to do rehab. The association is very busy working on protection of the profession.

Canada	CHAP feels that trained physical therapists with additional education in animal rehabilitation can complement the practice of veterinary medicine. The association advocates that physiotherapists provide services for animals that are injured, post-operative or lame by veterinary referral.
Finland	Nothing additional to share
Great Britain	(Survey was not received at time of writing)
Ireland	(Survey was not received at time of writing)
The Netherlands	We do not YET have rehabilitation centres.
South Africa	Nothing additional to share
Spain	There are foreigners, not trained as physiotherapists, which come and perform physiotherapy services in Spain. Additionally, French and British 'osteopaths' come to Spain to treat horses, as well as Swedish and British physios that come periodically to treat horses. Finally, there are some vets that study chiropractic in the USA and work in Spain as chiropractors.
Sweden	Nothing additional to share
Switzerland	The SVTPT feels that it is a great importance to get an international standard for the training of animal physiotherapists.
The United States of America	No doubt the practice of animal rehabilitation will continue to grow in the USA, but it likely will continue to do so in a way that overwhelmingly favours veterinarians and their staff. Whether PT's/PTA's and being limited to practice as a veterinary aide, assistant or technician, is questionable.

Discussion

Associations for the promotion of the practice of animal physiotherapy by physiotherapists have been in existence since 1984 and are continuing to form and expand. Small numbers of physiotherapists are currently engaged in animal physiotherapy. Membership numbers ranged from 10 to 450. So, despite concerns that have been proposed, the physiotherapy industry is not losing too many practitioners to the field of animal physiotherapy. Respondents shared some common needs or concerns, such as regulation of practice and non-physiotherapists engaged in the practice of animal physiotherapy. However, most countries have secured malpractice insurance for their members in order to practice animal physiotherapy. Educational standards were much diversified across the countries. Time frames ranged from 80 hours of training to a 2-year Master degree. It was difficult to compare the educational programs, as they were not well enough

described to be able to compare or contrast the components of each. North America seems to be the only places where physiotherapists / physical therapists cannot use their titles when providing treatment to animals (with the exception of Colorado or Nevada).

Conclusion

Much can be gained by learning from other countries that are undergoing the same struggles and successes. The results of this survey serve as a starting point for information distribution, and monitoring of the growth of the practice of animal physiotherapy. International collaboration, knowledge sharing, and information transfer could provide useful for future projects.

Post-Note

Since completion of this project, information has come forth regarding Ireland. As of the summer of 2008, the Chartered Physiotherapists in Veterinary Physiotherapy (CPVP) of Ireland had 35 members; those with an interest as well as those practicing animal physiotherapy. Liability insurance is available to their members and they are hopeful to establish regulation of the practice of veterinary physiotherapy in Ireland.