

{translated from Norwegian}

COMPETENCY

DIRECT ACCESS FOR THE [NORWEGIAN] PHYSIOTHERAPIST:

THE WRONG WAY TO GO

BY FREDDY KALTENBORN, PHYSIOTHERAPIST/RETIRED, HONORARY MEMBER OF THE NORWEGIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION.

First the [Norwegian] government must expand physiotherapy training programs to a minimum of five years, and thereafter evaluate whether the graduates of those programs possess the qualifications for direct access.

THE GOVERNMENT [in Norway] is considering legislation to allow patients access to physiotherapy services without referral from a physician, manual therapist, or chiropractor.ⁱ Such legislation should first require that physiotherapy education is fundamentally changed.

I have been involved in the development of physiotherapy and manual therapy professional practice throughout my long career and now also in my retirement. I have watched with growing concern the ongoing expansion of academic theoretical curricula in [Norwegian] physiotherapy educational programs, without expansion of total course hours [which reduces emphasis on clinical practice].

Bjørn Støre, a physical therapy teacher [well-known in Norway], is of the same opinion. We are not alone in our point of view.

OVERCROWDED PROGRAMS. Professor Eline Thornquist at the Høgskolen of Bergen states that [Norwegian physiotherapy educational] programs have become so overcrowded with courses that programs are on the “verge of collapse.”ⁱⁱ Anne Marit Mengshoel, University of Oslo (UiO) professor, agrees and asserts that inadequate practice and [sub-standard] clinical competency among recent graduates, could prevent future physiotherapists from meeting the demands of [patient care] in their professional life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Anne Riiser Svensen, former leader of the Norwegian Physiotherapy Specialization Group and physiotherapy teacher in Oslo, states that three years is not long enough to give students all the

knowledge they need and that [Norwegian] physiotherapy education today [suffers from] an overcrowded program.^{iv}

MUST BE EXPANDED. May L.T. Ringvold, physiotherapy teacher and former member of the Norwegian Physiotherapy Specialization Group, also states that three years are not enough to give the students all the knowledge they need in the required subjects. “As I see it today, a change to a 5-year masters-level program would be optimal for the patient and the physiotherapist, as well as for the profession and its development.”^v

We are all in agreement that [Norwegian] physiotherapy training today is inadequate for their professional requirements.

DANGEROUS. Direct access would require greater autonomy and responsibility of the [Norwegian] physiotherapist than they have today. Among other responsibilities, they will have to formulate a medical diagnosis and recognize underlying pathology. Given the status of physiotherapy education today, this would, without a doubt, be good for the physiotherapist, but dangerous for the patient.

The government must do things in the right sequence. First expand [Norwegian] physiotherapy education to a minimum of five years, and then determine whether physiotherapy program graduates possess the competency for direct patient access.

References

ⁱ *St. meld. Fremtidens primærhelsetjeneste – nærhet og helhet*, 26:62, 2014-2015. [Norwegian]

ⁱⁱ *Klassekampen* 28, September 2013. [Norwegian]

ⁱⁱⁱ *Fysioterapeuten*, November 2013. [Norwegian]

^{iv} *Fysioterapeuten*, April 2011. [Norwegian]

^v *Fysioterapeuten*, May 2011. [Norwegian]