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Practical Physiotherapy with Older People

LUCINDA SMYTH

**With contributions by
Rowena Kinsman
Helen Ransome
and Patricia Smith**

Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V.

© 1990 Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht
Originally published by Chapman and Hall in 1990.

Typeset in 10/12 Times by
Mayhew Typesetting, Bristol

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Smyth, Lucinda

Practical physiotherapy with older people.

1. Old persons. Physiotherapy

I. Title

615.8'2

ISBN 978-0-412-33580-8 ISBN 978-1-4899-3031-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4899-3031-6

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the contributors for their chapters in this book. In the preparation of the first four chapters valuable help was provided by physiotherapists' advice especially Lorna Cushnie, and the librarian Stephanie Skene of the Norfolk and Norwich Institute for Medical Education. Thanks are due to the Trustees of the Bicentenary Trust of this Institute for financial support. For encouragement and painstaking word processing sincere gratitude is offered to Muriel West.

Preface

Contrary to popular belief, practice of physiotherapy with elderly patients is no easy option. In addition to grappling with the effects of multipathology it presents problems of accommodating to the patients' altering physiological state and the accumulating life events of older age. There are challenges of ethics in decision making. In therapeutic management it is sometimes hard to know where to begin, what to try, and when to stop or offer something else. The work offers both satisfaction and despair, frustration and enormous interest.

Despite the existence of many specialist textbooks on medicine and physiotherapy, it is widely felt there is a place for a basic guide to physiotherapy with elderly people. This book aims to provide guidance and insights based on the writers' experience, as well as from the current literature. Good practice must be holistic in its breadth of knowledge and attitude to the individual, but meticulous in attention to detail in examination and treatment as for a patient of any age.

The key points of good practice described in this book have been validated. In order to devise a syllabus for physiotherapists studying this specialty, twelve experienced physiotherapists prepared separately lists of what each considered to be the 'key' points in good practice. These were found to be almost identical. An audit was conducted among the membership of the then Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Geriatric Medicine (120 physiotherapists). The 80% return confirmed the importance of these key points. The Association prepared a small booklet based on this advice, and 2000 copies have been sold to physiotherapists and other health professionals. Informal canvassing of opinion has confirmed that this booklet if enlarged would provide a useful handbook on physiotherapy with older people. This book is the result. The Association, now called the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists with a Special Interest in Elderly People, is the informal sponsor of this project.

Each of the seven 'key' points in good practice becomes the topic for a chapter. Definition of each point of physiotherapy practice is followed by a description. The final part of each chapter attempts to summarize how this part of the practice differs with respect to older as compared to younger people. The first four chapters deal with

physiotherapy and the patient as an individual, the next two are about relationships with other health professionals and health maintenance, and the last is on quality of care with advice to the physiotherapist on its achievement. In Chapters four and seven the sections 'Where do I begin' and 'How do I continue', describe activity in sequence, the second being based on the first. The last chapter not only describes accepted current methods but projects forward in describing new concepts which are only just beginning in practice. The order of chapters does not imply a fixed sequence or level of importance, but each informs the others. Common concepts and activities are repeated and used throughout the book and in patient care. For example, examination and evaluation should take place repeatedly. The subject matter covers a broad span, some parts being more applicable to individual physiotherapists than others. Many subjects in a book of this scope can only be introduced. Suggestions of material for further reading is provided in the bibliography for those who wish to pursue subjects in greater depth.

Although the term 'elderly' in this book is used (according to convention) as a universal label for people aged over 65 years, they do not, of course, conform to a type. No one would assume that a group of people aged between 35 and 65 would be homogeneous except in superficial ways. To an even greater extent due to physical, psychological and social factors, the range of difference among people between 65 and 95 or upward, must be wider.

The majority of very elderly patients encountered by physiotherapists are female. At present most therapists are female. Nevertheless, unless stated otherwise, the patient is usually referred to as male and the therapist as female for reasons of clarity and convenience.

The aim in producing this book is to promote good quality care and to engender in other physiotherapists as much enthusiasm for this area of work as the authors have enjoyed.

Lucinda Smyth