

Delivering for Population Health within Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy

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Introduction



Scotland faces notable challenges with poor health outcomes; including high levels of physical inactivity, obesity, and musculoskeletal (MSK) pain.

Physiotherapists are uniquely positioned to lead positive interventions, by identifying at-risk individuals early and implementing structured, evidence-based strategies to improve physical activity levels, functional capacity, and health markers.

Delivering on the priorities of frameworks for Scotland's Population Health and AHPs in public health, we looked to advocate for a culture of proactive health promotion within Dundee's MSK Physiotherapy Department

Aim and Drivers

Aim
In order to achieve this Aim...

Introduce routine health screening as part of Dundee MSK physiotherapy care, in order to identify individuals with poor health markers who may benefit from targeted interventions

Primary Driver
We need to ensure...

- Reliable, acceptable screening
- Staff capacity and capability
- Useful signposting
- Targeted interventions and improved pathways in Dundee Leisure & Culture

Secondary Driver
Which requires...

- Evidence based tools
- Patient comfortable to complete
- Tools can be completed within MSK assessment
- Staff training
- Good communication
- Agreed signposting to services and resources
- Easy patient access
- Information in simple format
- Physical activity/ education class within Physiotherapy
- Co-working with Dundee Leisure exercise referral programs

Change Ideas
Ideas to ensure this happens...

- Pilot study to test feasibility of screening
- Screening tools data gathered for baseline information
- Patient feedback on the process
- Make changes as required
- From Pilot study – staff feedback on the process and change as required
- Complete staff training – for screening tools and Making every contact count
- Regular communication and input from whole team
- Research available signposting
- Liaise with relevant partnership services
- Collate signposting on NHS Tayside Physiotherapy webpage
- Ease of access and all in one place
- Redevelopment of condition specific classes into an all-condition physical activity and education class, audit outcomes
- Physiotherapy staff to join Active for Life fitness instructors to support gym sessions delivery and patient transition into Leisure

Road Map

Planning

Pilot study – 5 PTs to test use of health screening tools (Scottish Physical Activity Screening Questionnaire (Scot-PASQ); BMI; waist circumference; grip strength; sit to stand x 5 timed; perceived walking speed), data collected, patient and staff questionnaires

Approvals

Submit for TASC, Clinical Governance, Caldicott Approval, Rapid Impact Assessment

Analysis

Completion of pilot – analysis of data and questionnaire outcomes, inform planning for roll out to all staff

Physical activity pathways

Redevelopment of our own exercise classes to widen scope. Improved pathways into Dundee Leisure Exercise Referral programs and collaborative working

Roll out

Health screening tools introduced to MSK team, training on MECC provided. Method of utilising screening decided by the team, on-going audit implemented

Results

The use of Health Screening Tools enabled the detection of patients at high risk of poor health outcomes:

- 4 in 6 patients were overweight or obese
- Only 1 in 6 scored above 40th percentile for grip strength
- 25% had reduced lower limb function on sit to stand testing

Correlation across the screening measures was excellent:

- Those meeting physical activity and/or resistance guideline had consistently better functional outcomes

95% of patients answered Strongly Agree or Agree to all nine questions on the patient questionnaire

98% patients surveyed felt comfortable throughout the screening process

95% of patients surveyed believed the screening process helped identify important aspects of their health

From Physiotherapy Staff Feedback:

“The health screening and resulting conversation was very valuable in adding to patient care and was worthwhile”

“The screening was really useful for relating a patient’s MSK condition to their overall health, I definitely recommend continuing its use”

Next Steps

- MSK Physiotherapy staff in Dundee are asked to complete the Scot-PASQ routinely for all patients, the additional health screening tools can be used on discretion of the therapist
- Snapshot monthly data collection on health screening & MECC using audit tool developed with public health
- Redeveloped all-condition exercise and education classes to be trialed commencing March 2026
- Collaborative working with Dundee Leisure exercise referral programmes - Physiotherapists based in leisure gyms to support pathways into leisure and physical activity

References

Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025 – 2035, The Scottish Government (2025); Scottish Allied Health Professions Public Health Strategic Framework Implementation Plan 2022 to 2027, The Scottish Government (2022); UK AHP Public Health Strategic Framework 2019-2024, Allied Health Professions Federation (2019)