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Opinion Paper #2

March 23, 2020

Clean Treatments

Upon starting schooling in the health field the very first thing we learned is the importance of cleanliness and sanitation. Learning how to properly wash our hands. We were then taught that we were to use hand sanitizer before and after each patient and to clean all equipment after each treatment session. This is to prevent the spread of any illnesses and to protect the health and well being of our patients and ourselves. In a study done to test the effectiveness of hand hygiene of health care personnel it stated “Hand hygiene is among the most important measures to prevent transmission and acquisition of Healthcare-associated infections.” (Fouad 2020)

In my experiences I have found that some places are better at keeping up with the standards of cleanliness that I was taught in school while some are not. I have experienced PT's and PTA's that work with therapy aides that are hired to make sure that everything is up to the high quality standard of cleanliness between each and every patient. Even when the therapy aides got busy or behind the PT's and PTA's were very conscious to then clean up their own treatment station. Along with washing their hands throughout the work day the PT's and PTA's used hand sanitizer before and after each and every patient assuring that the patient saw them use the hand sanitizer prior to their treatment. Treatment tables, therabands, gait belts and all exercise equipment were sanitized and the person wore gloves so as not to contaminate what was just cleaned.

Another experience I had was very different. They did not have therapy aides hired to help even though they were busy with high patient volume. This leaves the cleaning and sanitizing to the PT's and PTA's. The patients were elderly and had multiple comorbidities. It was cleaned each evening but not always cleaned between each patient. Hand sanitizer was used between patients but not always before and after each treatment. One example, when I was working with a patient I had taken off an ankle weight and noticed the patient's leg wound on her mid shin had seeped through her pants and onto the weight. As I finished with the patient I went to get cleaning supplies. However, someone had placed the weight back on the shelf without thinking therefore requiring wiping down more than just one weight. If the habit was intact it would have automatically been wiped down and not have been an issue.

I believe that all healthcare workers should never let cleanliness fall to the side no matter what setting you work in. For PT's and PTA's it is important as a lot of our treatments are hands-on. I do understand getting busy and falling behind and then feeling the rush to try and catch up. It can become easy to start skipping steps to save time. However, we need to remember that the "basic" steps we learn the first day in school can not be skipped. The steps that we learn to keep things clean are the most crucial steps and it keeps the health and safety of all involved. Sadly I think it is the first step that people skip. In the APTA Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant one topic they talk about is sound decisions. The "Standard 3C states as follows: Physical therapist assistants shall make decisions based upon their level of competence and consistent with patient/client values." (APTA Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant) Explaining that as healthcare professionals we will continue to learn and improve our skills. When our focus is turned, skills that we do not use as much may get lost if we are not careful and

remember to self-reflect. (APTA Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant) Each time you skip a cleaning step the easier it will be to skip it again, the more you skip it the easier it is to forget. It is important to never get out of the cleanliness habit as it should be second nature and never become a lost skill to any degree. In the Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist the 2nd principle 2A it states “Physical therapists shall adhere to the core values of the profession and shall act in the best interests of patients and clients over the interests of the physical therapist.” (Code of ethics for the physical therapist). What I take from this is that it is our professional duty to maintain a clean environment as it is in the best interest of the patients. The patient's safety is always our number one priority. I believe that the foundation for patient safety starts with cleanliness. If things are not clean no matter how hard we try we will not be able to keep our patients and others from contracting illnesses. Not only will they get sick but it will inhibit their healing.

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