

**MAKING WAVES:** The APPDE is the only European network of physiotherapists specialising in Parkinson's. It brings together research and best practice from around Europe so that people with Parkinson's can access the best possible therapy

# Perfect partners

Physiotherapy is an ideal resource for managing Parkinson's symptoms. It is also popular and clinically effective. Despite this, little consistent support for the discipline or its specialist practitioners is generally available across Europe. APPDE president **MARIELLA GRAZIANO** explains how things are changing for the better

**I**f physiotherapists and people with Parkinson's (PwPs) were partners in a relationship, both sides might complain to their friends about being misunderstood.

"I like how he makes me feel – but he doesn't really appreciate that I need more support on a long-term basis", the PwP might say of the physio.

"I would like to do more but I really need more information and support to enable this to happen," the physio may reply.

Fortunately this potentially damaging statement is gradually changing, much to the relief – and benefit – of both sides.

A systematic review of research evidence carried out in Autumn 2012 by the University of Birmingham (funded by Parkinson's UK and the UK's Department of Health) found small but significant improvements, especially in gait, gait speed and balance, in participants who had undertaken a short course of physiotherapy.

Add to this the results from the EPDA's Move for Change survey (see pages 22-24) – which found that physiotherapy was repeatedly recognised by the survey's 1,800 PwPs from 32 European countries as being the most accessible and helpful allied health service – and you might wonder why these perfect partners would ever struggle to see eye to eye.

The answer to this question can in part be found in the University of Birmingham's study, which claims that "referral rates to physiotherapy for PwPs have historically been low, owing to a

weak evidence base and poor availability of physiotherapy services".

However, the Association of Physiotherapists in Parkinson's Disease Europe (APPDE) is on a mission to help change both of these factors.

## WHAT IS THE APPDE AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The APPDE is a growing network of physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals who work to promote the use of best practice physiotherapy for PwPs and their families across Europe.

Our members are made up of clinicians, researchers and educators, each of whom work closely with members of the multidisciplinary team, policymakers, healthcare providers and patient associations at a European and national level.

We want every PwP in Europe to have regular access to a physiotherapist with Parkinson's-specific expertise. In order to achieve this, we:



## PHYSIOTHERAPY: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Physiotherapists work with people with Parkinson's to identify and maximise their ability to move and function. As the body's motor systems alter, the ability of the person to manage their chosen lifestyle is increasingly restricted.

An important role of the Parkinson's-specific physiotherapist is to help the person retain mobility, minimise secondary complications and, as the condition progresses, enable them to maintain health, wellbeing and quality of life.

With regular monitoring and specific treatment techniques, the physiotherapist can understand the specific needs of the person and their family in order to help them learn self-care and to maintain optimal function for as long as possible, thereby enabling a full life for all concerned.

- facilitate networking groups that promote best practice within individual European healthcare systems
- develop and support a wide range of Parkinson's-specific educational initiatives
- provide a forum to discuss potential research programmes as well as supporting collaborative networks to pursue research funding
- raise the profile of physiotherapy's contribution to the multidisciplinary team management of Parkinson's.

A large part of our remit is education as there are huge disparities in culture and knowledge levels across different



a European guideline and have played a major role bringing together the individual therapists from across Europe to work on the project). When published, the guideline will be available on the APPDE website.

### WHY DOES THE APPDE MATTER?

While Parkinson's symptoms are the same for PwPs across the world, healthcare systems vary in the way treatment is funded and organised and this, naturally, affects the delivery of physiotherapy.

For example, short residential periods of in-patient rehabilitation in specialist centres are the model in some parts of Europe such as Germany and Switzerland, but in the UK therapy courses are mostly delivered in outpatient departments or the home. In Luxembourg, meanwhile, PwPs have access to physiotherapy all year round, while this is not the case in Italy.

Networking with peers across Europe therefore enables greater cross-cultural understanding of different service delivery models and provides the opportunity to consider ways of doing things differently at home.

As the only European network of physios specialising in Parkinson's, the APPDE provides a 'knowledge transfer' platform, which brings together research

and best practice from around the continent – we then highlight this information and disseminate it to physios, whose patients then benefit.

countries. The APPDE therefore develops courses to meet each country's individual needs, often in their national language. These are collaborative efforts between local patient organisations, physiotherapy associations, service providers and educators, with the aim of developing skills according to evidence-based practice. Since 2006, the APPDE has run 10 courses across nine European countries.

### THE EUROPEAN GUIDELINE FOR PHYSIOTHERAPY IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE

One of the reasons why physiotherapy hasn't featured so highly on the Parkinson's radar has been due to the lack of a consistent European guideline. This is all about to change, however, with the European Guideline for Physiotherapy in Parkinson's Disease that is due to be published in 2013. It has been some three years in development.

The project is being led by academics from the University Nijmegen Medical Centre in the Netherlands as the recommendations are based on the Dutch guideline, which was developed in 2004. Other partners include the APPDE, the EPDA, ParkinsonNet, the European Region of the World Confederation for Physical

Therapists, the Royal Dutch Society for Physical Therapy (KNGF), and physios from 18 countries.

The guideline resulting from this collaborative effort includes a series of recommendations for Parkinson's-specialist physiotherapists that have been developed according to all the available evidence. They are designed to be used in conjunction with best clinical skills as well as the active involvement of the PwPs and their carers.

The APPDE has provided support for this initiative, both in terms of funding and in human resources (members of our network were instrumental in suggesting the need for

### THE APPDE'S RESOURCES

- The APPDE has a newly designed website. Check it out at [www.appde.eu](http://www.appde.eu)
- Follow us on Facebook: [facebook.com/euPhysioPD](https://facebook.com/euPhysioPD) and on Twitter: @euPhysioPD
- Our DVD – *Practical Guidelines for Physiotherapy in Parkinson's Disease* – is designed to facilitate physiotherapists' decisions on the best treatment options throughout the different disease stages. Based on the clinical practice guideline developed and supported by the Royal Dutch Society for Physical Therapy (KNGF), it includes background on Parkinson's, information on compensatory movement strategies, therapy aims for different disease stages, details of evaluation methods, and evidence-based guidelines with supporting references.

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The APPDE is something of a guidance counsellor – we encourage physios and the Parkinson's community to speak to each other and to see how they can help each other. It may not yet be a marriage made in heaven, but the work of the APPDE combined with the publication of an up-to-date European-wide guideline means that physios and PwPs should feel more confident than ever in their relationship. ■

*Mariella Graziano is president of the APPDE and an EPDA board member.*