



## Critical Role of Physical Therapist in Critical Care Unit

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The purpose of writing this letter is to provide evidence on the crucial contribution of physiotherapists within the critical care setting, particularly in the intensive care unit (ICU). As the demand for critical care services continues to increase, it becomes important to acknowledge the pivotal role that physiotherapists play in improving patient outcomes and facilitating the recovery process.

Physiotherapists in the ICU are integral members of the multidisciplinary team, working closely with physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals to deliver comprehensive care to critically ill patients. Their expertise includes rehabilitative techniques, respiratory management, and mobility interventions, all of which are crucial in optimizing functional outcomes and mitigating complications associated with prolonged bed rest and immobilization.

One of the distinguishing features of physiotherapists in the ICU is their ability to make critical decisions regarding patient care. Beyond rehabilitation, they are empowered to make decisions such as when to intubate a patient, adjust ventilator settings, decide on extubation, and respond to emergency situations such as the need for CPR. This aspect of their role elevates critical care physical therapy above other fields of physical therapy, underscoring the breadth and depth of their responsibilities.

Furthermore, physiotherapists are trained to promptly recognize and respond to sudden changes in patient condition, including cardiac arrest, hypotension, and acute respiratory decompensation. Their vigilance and proactive intervention can be life-saving in such emergent situations, highlighting their critical role in ensuring patient safety and stability within the ICU environment.

Respiratory complications are a common challenge in critically ill patients, including issues like atelectasis, pneumonia, and ventilator-associated lung injury. Physiotherapists are equipped with a range of techniques, including chest physiotherapy, airway clearance maneuvers, and non-invasive ventilation strategies, to optimize lung function and support weaning from mechanical ventilation. Evidence-based practices in respiratory therapy are

paramount, and physiotherapists play a central role in implementing these strategies to enhance respiratory outcomes and reduce the risk of respiratory failure.

A study conducted by Ntinga & Van (2020), emphasized the role of physiotherapists not confined to chest physiotherapy but also involve in collaboration of other health care professionals in crucial decision making regarding opting for ventilatory support and other emergency decision making. Another study conducted by Lehmkuhl, et al. (2024) showed that it was all possible because of team work of other health care professionals with physiotherapists that helped in mobilizing ventilator patients leading to improvement in mortality rate of ICU.

Despite the evident importance of physiotherapists in the ICU, there remains a disparity in recognition and understanding within the profession itself. Some physical therapists may hold onto traditional mindsets, limiting their scope of practice within the ICU setting. This mindset impedes the full utilization of physiotherapists' expertise and creates challenges for those striving to implement evidence-based rehabilitation practices.

In summary, physiotherapists in the ICU deserve recognition for their expertise, dedication, and tireless efforts in delivering high-quality care to critically ill patients. Their holistic approach to patient care, coupled with their specialized skills in rehabilitation and respiratory therapy, significantly contributes to the success of critical care interventions and improves the quality of life for ICU survivors.

As we witness a growing demand for critical care services and increasingly complex patient needs, it is imperative for healthcare management and policymakers to prioritize the integration of physiotherapy services within the ICU setting. By recognizing and supporting the vital role of physiotherapists, we can ensure that critically ill patients receive comprehensive, evidence-based care that maximizes their potential for recovery and long-term well-being.

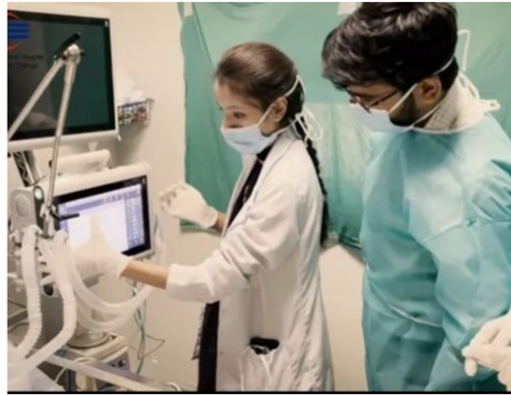


Figure 1

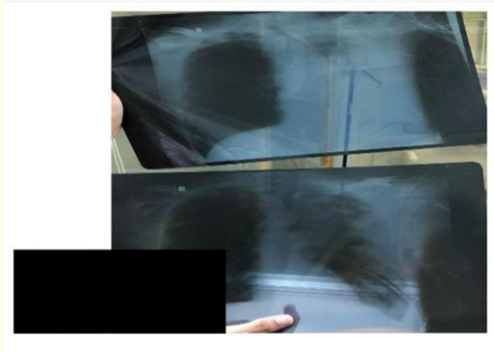


Figure 2



Figure 3

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