ACOPRA does not have a requirement for 1000 hours of supervised clinical experience in entry level physiotherapy programs

I am writing to draw attention to erroneous information included in the Editorial *Is education immune from evidence-based scrutiny?* by Chipchase and colleagues, published in the last issue of the *Australian Journal of Physiotherapy*.

In this Editorial, Chipchase et al make the following statements regarding ACOPRA.

An example of the lack of evidence base for physiotherapy curriculum is the requirement by the Australian Council of Physiotherapy Regulating Authorities (ACOPRA), albeit not enshrined in policy, that all Australian entry level physiotherapy programs provide 1000 hours of supervised clinical experience. This requirement is based on opinion and intuition rather than credible research … And what of the recommended 1000 clinical hours? Is this really the indisputable benchmark for achieving clinical competency? (p. 134).

While the Editorial is timely in many respects, it is very disappointing that the authors were not as diligent as they should have been in their own evidence-based scrutiny when preparing the Editorial, relying upon unsubstantiated opinion rather than the evidence in making these statements.

Nowhere in ACOPRA documentation relevant to accreditation of entry level programs is 1000 hours of supervised clinical experience mentioned. Not in policy; not in the ACOPRA position statement ‘The Primacy of a Comprehensive Physiotherapy Clinical Education Program’; not in the two sets of standards which are used to evaluate programs for accreditation (The Australian Physiotherapy Competency Standards and the ACOPRA Standards for the Accreditation of Physiotherapy Programs at the Level of Higher Education Awards), and not in the ACOPRA manuals of procedures and guidelines provided to physiotherapy schools to assist them in their documentation for accreditation.

ACOPRA does not accredit programs on a set number of hours of clinical experience, and nor should it. ACOPRA is far more responsible than the authors would have readers believe. When an ACOPRA accreditation committee evaluates the documentation provided by a university against the two sets of standards referred to previously it is concerned with the quality, comprehensiveness, and depth of the clinical education experience provided by a physiotherapy program for its students. It is also pertinent to mention that these two sets of standards were developed and signed off by the three stakeholders groups which make up ACOPRA — the registration boards, the schools of physiotherapy, and the APA.

It is noteworthy that the same issue of the *Australian Journal of Physiotherapy* in which this Editorial appeared also contained a Letter to the Editor from the President of the WCPT, Sandra Mercer Moore, titled *WCPT no longer requires 1000 hours of clinical experience*. Sandra Mercer Moore’s letter explained that WCPT dropped the 1000 clinical hours requirement in 1991.

It is disappointing that the authors of the Editorial were insufficiently diligent in their evidence-based scrutiny in apparently neither checking all readily available ACOPRA accreditation documentation and standards in preparing their article nor, for completeness, seeking from the originator of the ‘1000 hours mantra’, the WCPT, an up to date statement of its position.

ACOPRA exists as a Board comprised of Directors who represent the key stakeholders, namely each state and territory registration board, the schools of physiotherapy group, and the APA. ACOPRA values debate on education but is uncompromising when accuracy is a victim in such a debate.

Ruth Grant
Chair, ACOPRA

Reference

We must seek to understand what constitutes effective entry level clinical education

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by Emeritus Professor Ruth Grant, Chair of ACOPRA, regarding our Editorial *Is education immune from evidence-based scrutiny?* As Professor Grant has confirmed, ACOPRA does not require that entry level physiotherapy programs provide 1000 hours of supervised clinical practice to their students. We acknowledge that an explicit statement about the amount of clinical education required within entry-level physiotherapy programs is not within ACOPRA documentation. However, the responses and feedback to this Editorial suggest that there is a level of misunderstanding amongst clinicians and academics that 1000 clinical hours is still a requirement for entry level training. The clarification provided by the WCPT and the response by ACOPRA to our Editorial provide timely and accessible statements concerning this issue.

The intent of our Editorial was to promote discussion around the issues facing entry level physiotherapy education in Australia. As we indicated in the Editorial, the time is right to evaluate, promote, and debate so that an educational framework based on credible research evidence can be
developed. The current debate and discussions, related to education, are without doubt very important for our profession. As Professor Grant herself noted in 1995 (p. 344), ‘The pursuit of evidence that physiotherapy intervention is effective, is indistinguishable from the pursuit of excellence in physiotherapy in times of constant change and challenge.’ The emphasis of our Editorial was to highlight that as a profession we must seek to understand what constitutes effective entry level physiotherapy education, particularly clinical education, at a time when education and health sectors in Australia face considerable change and challenge. We believe these issues are a national priority for the immediate and long term future of our profession.

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References