

Independence and quality of life: revisiting core assumptions in physiotherapy and rehabilitation

Gibson BE

Department of Physical Therapy, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

Email: barbara.gibson@utoronto.ca

This presentation critically examines key assumptions embedded in physiotherapy practice in order to advance current debates and suggest areas for further inquiry. Recent advances in health care treatment and technologies have resulted in the emergence of new populations of clients with complex rehabilitation needs and often uncertain futures. Prevailing approaches to rehabilitation are rooted in Western notions of the independent, autonomous individual that constrain professionals' abilities to help clients live well with difference, disability or uncertainty and may contribute to their marginalization. In physiotherapy research and practice, quality of life is pervasively equated with physical function and degree of independence. However research shows a lack of correlation between person's perceptions of well being and their functional abilities. Through research and case study examples, a critical social science approach is used to discuss how prevailing understandings of 'independence' and 'quality of life' increasingly limit the abilities of physiotherapists and other rehabilitation professionals to adequately address clients' needs. Critical approaches can be used to reconsider dependency, focusing on connectivities and living well in the present. The implications for a re-imagined physiotherapy will be discussed including how changes to assumptions about independence and quality of life can contribute to broader social changes that improve the wellbeing of clients.