



## ນທບາທແລກກາຮງານຂອງນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມ

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Received: April 21, 2016

Revised & Accepted: July 21, 2016

### ນທຄັດຢ່ອ

ກາຣີຈັນນີ້ມີວັດຖຸປະສົງເພື່ອຄືການທບາທແລກກາຮງານຂອງນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມໃນຈັງຫວັດບຸຮັມຍໍ ຂໍ້ມູນກຸມ ແລະນຄຣາະສົມາ ທີ່ເປັນພື້ນທີ່ມີຈຳນວນນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດປະມຸນກຸມຕົງຈານແນບເຕີມເວລາໃນສຕານບົກກາຮງານສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມມາກີ່ສຸດ ດຳເນີນກາຣີກາໂດຍລຶ່ງແນບສອນຄາມຄືນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມໃນ 3 ຈັງຫວັດດັ່ງກ່າວຈຳນວນ 150 ຮາຍ ທີ່ມີຜູ້ລ່ວງແນບສອນຄາມທີ່ມີຂໍ້ມູນສມບູຮຸນົກລັບຄືນມາຈຳນວນ 94 ຮາຍ (ຮ້ອຍລະ 62.7) ໂດຍເປັນນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານພາຍນາລະໃນໜຸ່ມໜຸ່ນຈຳນວນ 81 ຮາຍ ພົກກາຣີກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານທບາທແລກກາຮງານຫລັກຂອງນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດກຸ່ມດັ່ງກ່າວ ໄດ້ແກ່ ກາຣີໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານໃນກຸ່ມເລື່ອງ ຜູ້ປ່າຍໂຮກເຮື່ອຮັງ ຜູ້ປ່າຍຮະຍະຫລັງເລື່ອນພລັນ ແລະຄນພິກາຣ ແລກກາຣີໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານຕ້ານກາຍອຸປະກຳ ກາຣີປັບສກາພນຳບັດແລກສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມ ທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານປະກອບດ້ວຍຫລາກຫລາຍກິຈກະຮົມໂດຍຈັດກິຈກະຮົມລະປະມານ 3-4 ຄັ້ງຕ່ອງເດືອນ ແລະສ່ວນໃໝ່ໃຫ້ເວລາຄັ້ງລະປະມານ 1 ທີ່ໄວ້ໂມງ ສ່ວນຈຳນວນຜູ້ຮັບບົກກາຮງານມີຈຳນວນແຕກຕ່າງກັນໄປເຂັ້ມກັບລັກຄນະຂອງກິຈກະຮົມ ພົກກາຣີກາພນຳບັດທີ່ໃຫ້ບົກກາຮງານພື້ນຖານຜູ້ຜົດລິຕິນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດ ແລະໜ່ວຍງານຕ່າງ ຖ້າ ທີ່ເກື່ອງຂອງກັບວິຊາເຊື້ອພົກກາຍກາພນຳບັດ ສໍາໜັບໃຫ້ໃນການກຳຫຼາດກລຸ່ມທີ່ເພື່ອສັນສົ່ງການທຳມາແນບເຕີມເວລາໃນສຕານບົກກາຮງານສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມຂອງນັກກາຍກາພນຳບັດໃນອານາຄຕ

ຄໍາສຳຄັນ : ກາຍກາພນຳບັດ ກາຣີດູແລສຸຂພາພະດັບປະມຸນກຸມ ທຸນ່ານ

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## Roles and workloads of physical therapists providing primary health care services

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore the roles and workloads of physical therapists (PTs) who were providing primary health care services in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces, the areas having the greatest number of PTs working full-time at primary health care settings. A questionnaire was distributed to 150 PTs currently providing primary health care services in those three provinces; 94 (62.7%) of them responded. Of 94 participants, 81 provided both institutional- and community-based services. The results revealed that the main roles and workloads of the participants were services for risk people and persons with chronic diseases, sub-acute conditions and disabilities, and services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification. In each service, they conducted a lot of activities about 3-4 times a month per activity and spent about one hour for most of the activities. The number of clients receiving each service varied, depending on the activities. The information should be useful for physical therapy schools and other organizations related to physical therapy profession to establish strategies to support the full-time work at primary care settings of PTs in the future.

**Keywords:** Physical therapy, Primary health care, Community

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## Introduction

Primary health care services were defined as continuing health care services with the collaboration of people by integrating bodies of knowledge of medicine, psychology and social science. The services are provided to the individuals, families and community by concentrating on health promotion, disease prevention, curative care and rehabilitation with holistic approach, proper referring system and community participation. The optimal goal of the services is to develop the spirit of self-care and self-reliance of the clients<sup>(1)</sup>. At present, health service in Thailand has been focused on health promotion and disease prevention with the slogan of “building before repairing health”<sup>(2)</sup>. Primary health care settings (namely sub-district health promotion hospitals or urban health centers) are established thorough the country for distributing primary health care services to the community. Furthermore, there is a rising trend in community-dwellers who need physical therapy services, e.g. the elderly, persons with chronic illnesses or disabilities<sup>(3,4)</sup>. These reasons lead to an increase in roles of physical therapists (PTs) at primary health care settings<sup>(5,6)</sup>. Currently, PTs who are working at primary health care settings may be categorized into 2 characteristics: full-time and part-time staff. A full-time PT works at a primary health care setting for the whole of each week under the administration of the hospital or center directly. A part-time PT works at a primary health care setting for only part of each week. S/he is usually a PT of a district or provincial hospital of that area.

Working at a primary health care setting seems to be a new role of PTs. Based on the database of Thai Community Physical Therapist Club in late-2014, there were only 39 PTs currently working full-time at primary health care settings thorough the country; most of them (21 of 39, 53.9%) were in the northeastern region. To promote the full-time work at primary health

care settings of PTs, the current information about the roles and workloads of PTs who are providing primary health care services in our country is considered as fundamental data. Such information, however, has been limited. The investigator was thus interested in studying current situation of PTs who were providing primary health care services, either as full-time or part-time personnel of primary health care settings. Because most of PTs currently working full-time at primary health care settings are in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces, these 3 provinces were selected as a study area of this research. This study aimed to explore the roles and workloads of PTs who were providing primary health care services in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces.

## Materials and Methods

### Participants

The main target population of this research was PTs who were providing primary health care services in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces. From the database of Thai Community Physical Therapist Club and the personal communication with some PTs in the study areas, there were 150 PTs currently working as full-time or part-time staff at primary health care settings in these 3 provinces. The criteria for recruiting the participants were 1) 20 years of age or older, 2) female or male and 3) willing to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

### Research tools

A survey questionnaire designed by the investigator contained 2 sections. The demographic data of the participants were explored by 13 questions of the first section. The second section consisted of 9 questions about the roles and workloads of the participants. These questions were derived from available evidences for community physical therapy<sup>(7-9)</sup>. Before

conducting the data collection, the questionnaire was examined for its content validity by 3 PTs who had experiences in community works. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence of each item of the questionnaire was calculated and presented with the minimum value at least  $0.50^{(10)}$ .

### **Data collection procedure and analysis**

The survey was conducted from June to September, 2015 with the approval of the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee for Human Research (HE582120). The questionnaire and an information sheet providing a full explanation of the study with a return stamped addressed envelope were sent to 150 participants. The PTs were asked to return the questionnaire to the investigator within 4 weeks. After the deadline for the questionnaire submission, the investigator sent the questionnaire to the participants again and reminded them via e-mail to return the questionnaire to the investigator within next 2 weeks. All data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

## **Results**

### **Demographic data**

Of 150 questionnaires distributed, 103 (68.7%) were returned. Nine of the returned questionnaires were discarded because they were totally blank, resulting in 94 (62.7%) questionnaires being analyzed for the study. Of 94 participants, 85 (90.4%) and 9 (9.6%) were part-time PTs (working at a primary health care setting for only part of each week) and full-time PTs (working at a primary health care setting for the whole of each week), respectively. Seventy-one (83.5%) part-time PTs and 8 (88.9%) full-time PTs had their stand-alone physical therapy department (or

unit). The rest of them were under other departments such as family or social medicine, nurse, pharmacy and Thai traditional medicine. Demographic characteristics of both groups of the participants are presented in **Table 1**. The participants were 24 to 47 years old with an average of  $29.9 \pm 4.5$  years. Eighty-six (91.5%) PTs were females. Eleven (11.7%) participants held a master's degree. The participants worked at the current workplace with an average of  $5.5 \pm 3.1$  years; 60 (63.8%) of them worked for 5 years or less. Sixty-four (68.1%) participants were employed as public servants. For the part-time group, about 60% of them had a PT as the administrative head. For the full-time group, all of them worked under the administration of other health professions. The first and last priorities of physical therapy services mentioned by the participants were curative care and disease prevention, respectively. The number of patients treated per day was  $25.4 \pm 14.1$  and  $7.0 \pm 2.7$  cases for the part-time and full-time PTs, respectively. Apart from physical therapy services, the participants had other works, especially the administrative and documenting works. Time spent for administrative and documenting works were reported at  $5.9 \pm 5.0$  and  $8.0 \pm 4.9$  hours per week, respectively. Of 94 participants, 81 (86.2%) provided both institutional- and community-based services to the clients with the ratios of 4:1 days per week for 38 (46.9%) participants and 3:2 days per week for 33 (40.7%) participants. Thirteen (13.8%) participants organized only the institutional-based service because their workplaces had been upgraded from community hospitals to general hospitals.

**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of participants (n=94)

Characteristics	Part-time PTs (n=85), No. (%)	Full-time PTs (n=9), No. (%)
Female	78 (91.8)	8 (88.9)
Educational level		
bachelor's degree	74 (87.1)	9 (100.0)
master's degree (physical therapy, sport sciences, physiology of exercise, community health development, public administration, business)	11 (12.9)	0 (0.0)
Workplace		
central hospital / provincial hospital	13 (15.3)	0 (0.0)
community hospital	72 (84.7)	0 (0.0)
primary health care setting (sub-district health promotion hospital, urban health center)	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)
Length of being a physical therapist at the current workplace		
≤ 1 year	1 (1.2)	1 (11.1)
1-5 years	50 (58.8)	8 (88.9)
6-10 years	25 (29.4)	0 (0.0)
≥ 11 years	9 (10.6)	0 (0.0)
Type of employment		
public servant	64 (75.3)	0 (0.0)
employee of the Ministry of Public Health	16 (18.8)	8 (88.9)
other (government employee, temporary worker)	5 (5.9)	1 (11.1)
Professional background of the administrative head		
physical therapist	50 (58.8)	0 (0.0)
medical doctor	20 (23.5)	1 (11.1)
public health technical officer	1 (1.2)	6 (66.7)
other (nurse, pharmacist, medical technologist, public health officer)	14 (16.5)	2 (22.2)
First priority of physical therapy services (answer more than one item)		
curative care	74 (87.1)	7 (77.8)
rehabilitation	14 (16.5)	5 (55.6)
health promotion / disease prevention	8 (9.4)	2 (22.2)
Characteristic of physical therapy services		
both institutional- and community-based services	72 (84.7)	9 (100.0)
only institutional-based service	13 (15.3)	0 (0.0)

PTs: physical therapists

### Roles and workloads

Eighty-one participants who performed both institutional- and community-based services were further analyzed for their roles and workloads in community-based work. Services for risk people, persons with chronic diseases, persons with sub-acute

conditions as well as persons with disabilities and services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification were the main roles reported by more than 80% of the participants (**Table 2**). Only 10 (12.4%) of them mentioned the role in young and teenage group.

**Table 2** Number of participants providing each role in community-based services (n=81)

Community-based services (answer more than one item)	Number of participants (%)
Services for risk people and persons with chronic diseases	74 (91.4)
Services for persons with sub-acute conditions	72 (88.9)
Services for persons with disabilities	72 (88.9)
Services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification	70 (86.4)
Services for the elderly	53 (65.4)
Community-based rehabilitation	50 (61.7)
Services for mother and child	31 (38.3)
Services for working-age group	27 (33.3)
Services for young and teenage group	10 (12.4)

**Table 3** describes workloads of 81 participants in the top three roles in community-based services shown in Table 2. In each role, they conducted a lot of activities about 3-4 times a month per activity and

spent about one hour for most of the activities. The number of clients receiving the services varied, depending on details of the activities.

**Table 3** Workloads of participants in the top three roles in community-based services (n=81) (Data presented as mean (standard deviation))

Community-based services (answer more than one item)	Characteristics of services		
	Frequency (times/month)	Duration (minutes/time)	Number of clients (persons/time)
<b>Services for risk people and persons with chronic diseases (n=74)</b>			
assessment of the risks (n=35)	3.3 (2.9)	71.3 (62.4)	24.3 (18.0)
assessment of the symptoms / complications (n=55)	3.4 (2.9)	83.1 (73.0)	32.4 (22.9)
education about diseases / appropriate behaviors (n=59)	3.4 (2.7)	54.6 (67.4)	29.1 (21.3)
education about physical therapy techniques (n=62)	3.4 (2.8)	52.4 (64.9)	25.4 (20.3)
provision of home health care (n=57)	4.6 (3.1)	139.6 (85.4)	7.1 (7.8)
facilitation of self-help groups among risk people or the patients (n=21)	2.1 (1.4)	104.8 (160.7)	34.6 (20.1)
<b>Services for persons with sub-acute conditions (n=72)</b>			
carrying a survey of target persons (n=42)	3.9 (3.6)	76.2 (62.1)	5.7 (3.9)
assessment and diagnosis for service planning (n=50)	4.4 (3.2)	60.6 (42.7)	4.6 (3.1)
provision of home health care (n=71)	4.7 (3.1)	161.0 (76.5)	4.2 (1.9)
education about rehabilitation to family, village health volunteers and other health personnel (n=56)	2.7 (2.5)	60.8 (44.4)	16.7 (18.0)
provision of assistive devices / home modification (n=57)	3.4 (2.6)	71.0 (52.6)	5.2 (6.6)
<b>Services for persons with disabilities (PWDs) (n=72)</b>			
carrying a survey and registration of PWDs (n=55)	3.0 (2.9)	70.5 (63.4)	10.2 (14.6)
assessment and diagnosis for service planning (n=61)	4.8 (5.8)	71.9 (65.0)	8.3 (12.3)
provision of home health care (n=71)	4.9 (4.3)	151.7 (109.5)	7.1 (9.6)
education about rehabilitation to family, village health volunteers and other health personnel (n=62)	3.0 (3.0)	70.1 (47.7)	16.9 (17.5)
provision of home modification (n=50)	4.1 (3.7)	78.6 (56.9)	4.9 (8.5)
facilitation of self-help groups among PWDs (n=30)	2.5 (2.9)	60.0 (45.7)	15.6 (17.5)

**Table 3** (Cont.)

Community-based services (answer more than one item)	Characteristics of services		
	Frequency (times/month)	Duration (minutes/time)	Number of clients (persons/time)
<b>Services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification (n=70)</b>			
carrying a survey of target persons (n=56)	3.6 (3.6)	72.8 (50.1)	5.5 (5.9)
assessment for physical fitness and conditions (n=59)	3.5 (3.4)	72.6 (45.3)	5.6 (6.6)
provision of suitable assistive devices (n=68)	3.3 (3.4)	69.1 (48.8)	4.0 (3.9)
modification or instruction for proper environment (n=58)	3.3 (3.7)	83.5 (58.2)	2.9 (2.9)
coordination with other organizations (n=48)	2.8 (3.0)	60.9 (32.8)	3.6 (3.7)
evaluation after use and re-adjustment (n=52)	2.8 (3.1)	63.5 (46.6)	3.7 (3.3)

### Work problems

In their institutional- and community-based services, 79 of 81 participants faced a lot of problems or barriers, especially excessive workload and limited

number of staff (**Table 4**). Furthermore, about 50-60% of them complained about the insufficient cooperation with related organizations and supporting budget.

**Table 4** Problems or barriers of participants in institutional- and community-based physical therapy services (n=81)

Problems or barriers (answer more than one item)	Number of participants (%)
Excessive workload, resulting in inability to organize the services to the community as much as expected	67 (82.7)
Insufficient number of physical therapists	66 (81.5)
Insufficient cooperation with related organizations	48 (59.3)
Insufficient supporting budget	41 (50.6)
Insufficient support from the main organization	27 (33.3)
Necessary to follow the organization's policy, resulting in inability to provide services relevant to needs of the community	25 (30.9)
Difficulty in travelling to the target area	24 (29.6)
Poor coordination and communication among personnel within the organization	22 (27.2)
Insufficient knowledge and skills of community physical therapy	21 (25.9)
Lack of practice guidelines for various disease conditions in the community	18 (22.2)
Poor understanding of other staff of the organization about roles of physical therapists	14 (17.3)
Insufficient information about the target community, resulting in inability to relate the disease occurrence to the way of life of the community	11 (13.6)
Other (low salary/income)	1 (1.2)
No problem	2 (2.5)

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, a questionnaire was sent to 150 PTs who were currently working as full-time or part-time staff at primary health care settings in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces. Of 19 PTs who were full-time staff, however, only 9 (47.4%) returned the questionnaire. Data comparisons between full-time and part-time groups were thus not

possible. Hence, results and discussion of the research were presented for the participants overall. Nevertheless, it could be observed that the prominent difference between part-time and full-time PTs who were providing primary health care services in the 3 provinces was about the professional background of the administrative head. Most of the part-time staff had a PT as the administrative head; meanwhile all of the full-time staff worked under

the administration of non-physical therapy personnel. A possible reason for this finding is full-time working at a primary health care setting, either a sub-district health promotion hospital or an urban health center, is a new role of PTs. At present, the main health personnel of a primary health care setting are registered nurses or nurse practitioners and public health officers<sup>(11)</sup>. If required, PTs will be included in a primary health care setting as full-time or part-time staff. No formal physical therapy department has been specified in the administrative structure of primary health care settings. Therefore, full-time PTs of primary health care settings had to work under the administration of other health personnel.

A great number of the participants were employed as public servants or employees of the Ministry of Public Health. The finding was quite different from that of a survey study in 2001<sup>(12)</sup> which presented that most of PTs in the community hospitals were temporary workers. This could be implied that the employment of PTs in community-based settings was improving. Most of the participants provided both institutional- and community-based services. Time spent for the community-based service was about 1-2 days per week. Although the roles of PTs in the community are extensive for healthy and non-healthy clients in all ages<sup>(7-9)</sup>, more than 80% of the participants focused their services on persons with chronic diseases, sub-acute conditions and disabilities. Services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification were another main issue. These services corresponded to the increasing number of persons with chronic diseases or disabilities<sup>(3,4)</sup> and the long term care policy of our country<sup>(13)</sup>. The services for other target groups, especially working-age, young and teenage groups, were mentioned by only one-third or less of the participants. In fact, PTs have a role in encouraging these groups of people to adopt for appropriate health-promoting behaviors to continue into the healthy elderly<sup>(14)</sup>. Such a role is limited probably due to insufficient number of PTs (i.e. only about

2 PTs per workplace) and excessive workload, leading to inability to organize the services to the community as much as expected. These factors were expressed as the main work problems or barriers by the participants. The findings are consistent with those presented in previous studies of PTs<sup>(15-18)</sup>, nurses<sup>(19)</sup> and pharmacists<sup>(20)</sup>. In the present situation of limited budget of our country, a request for increasing number of PTs in any health setting should not be possible. To contribute effective community-based services, therefore, PTs should not provide the services alone but establish the collaboration with other relating agencies in the community, e.g. other health professions, community volunteers, local governments, private sectors. Networking with local governments including sub-district administrative organization, municipality and provincial administrative organization should be useful for PTs for the support of resources, e.g. manpower, materials, money. Apart from being providers of direct care, PTs are able to play various roles in community-based services, e.g. team leaders and managers, program facilitators, skill trainers and advisors to local governments and community on establishing the service<sup>(21,22)</sup>. Community participation should be able to help PTs combat the problem of insufficient number of staff and organize the services to the community as much as they need<sup>(23)</sup>. Hence, in community-based services, PTs should learn to work in a format of teamwork and to develop team capacity. They should have a high degree of flexibility and a wide range of management and practice<sup>(24)</sup>. To prepare PTs to work in community settings, physical therapy schools should design community-oriented curriculums or educational programs which provide adequate knowledge, skills and attitude towards community works to the students who will be our future PTs.

When determining the top three roles in community-based services in detail, it could be observed that the longest duration of activity (i.e. 2-3 hours) was found in the services of home health care either for risk

people, persons with chronic diseases, sub-acute conditions or for persons with disabilities. Despite spending long service duration, each service of home health care could provide for a small number of clients. According to the regulation of the National Health Security Office, Thai people with home-bound conditions have a right to receive home health care at least once a month<sup>(25)</sup>. PTs, with the collaboration of nurses or other health personnel, are assigned to take responsibility for home health care for these groups of people<sup>(26,27)</sup>. Hence, home health care was one of prominent community-based services of PTs. However, due to the long duration needed for each service of home health care and a limited number of staff, home health care services with the collaboration with other relating agencies in the community is necessary for PTs, as mentioned above.

As the current study could recruit only 9 full-time PTs of primary health care settings, this could be a limitation of the study in term of generalization of the findings. Future research on such full-time PTs throughout the country should be considered. It will clearly specify the roles and workloads of PTs who provide primary health care services in the current situation. The information should be useful for physical therapy schools, organizations of physical therapy profession, the Ministry of Public Health and the National Health Security Office to establish strategies to support the full-time work at primary care settings of PTs in the future.

In conclusion, PTs who were providing primary health care services in Buri Ram, Chaiyaphum and Nakhon Ratchasima Provinces had the main roles on services for risk people and persons with chronic diseases, sub-acute conditions and disabilities, and services of assistive devices and home and/or environment modification. In each service, they conducted a lot of activities about 3-4 times a month per activity and spent about one hour for most of the activities. The number of clients receiving each service varied, depending on the activities.

## Acknowledgement

This research was supported by Graduate School and Faculty of Associated Medical Sciences, Khon Kaen University. The most sincere thanks were expressed to all physical therapists for their cooperation with this study. The authors were extremely thankful to Dr. Pakavalee Poomsutat, Dr. Sauwanan Bumrerraj and Dr. Saowanee Nakmareong for their comments to the development, refinement and completion of the study.

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